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Exploring Lived Experiences of University Students Attending a Residential University in the Midwest Who Have Moved Home as a Result of COVID-19

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Exploring Lived Experiences of University Students Attending a Residential University in the Midwest Who Have Moved Home as a Result of COVID-19

by
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Abstract

College students' stress levels and mental health problems continue to rise (Acharya, Collins, & Jin, 2016; Galatzer-Levy & Bonanno, 2013; Gallagher, 2009; Gallagher, 2012; Giamos, Lee, Suleiman, Stuart, & Chen, 2017; Li 2018; Ketchen-Lipson, Gaddis, Heinze, & Eisenberg, 2015; Shepherd & Edleman, 2009; Wood, 2012). Social support experienced in a residential university setting mitigates the negative impact of these dynamics on student success, health, and retention (Bland, Melton, Welle, & Bigham, 2012; Buote, 2007; Gosnell, 2019; Nicpon et al., 2006; Watkins & Hill, 2016). However, in mid-March 2020, a major disruptor in the form of an outbreak of COVID-19 (a coronavirus with a high contagion rate and symptoms that include coughing, sore throat, and difficulty breathing which could lead to severe and fatal illnesses) led higher education institutions to cancel in-person classes and require a majority of their residential students to leave campus. Borrowing heavily from a phenomenological research methodology, this project utilized an action research design to facilitate data collection and analysis of interviews with sixteen sophomore students about their lived experience of a major disruption of moving away from campus. The study found that after a brief adjustment period, the majority of students reported they were doing better than they had expected they would and rated their mental health as good. Although the study concludes that students experienced ongoing learning about their identity, including their own resilience, the study also indicated that students reported a growing awareness of their own fragility and of their need for community.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

College is one of the most stressful times in life (Acharya, Li & Collins, 2018; Galatzer-Levy & Bonanno, 2013; Hales, 2009). College students experience academic pressure, time management issues, relationship concerns, financial burdens, family pressure, mental health challenges, friendship issues, competition, multiple changes in residence, and decision-making pressure (Hales, 2009; Kruisselbrink, 2013). Stemming from the emotional impact of these experiences, researchers report that 75% of undergraduate students feel at least a moderate amount of stress (Garett, Lui, & Young, 2017; Pierceall & Keim, 2017). Through data received by the National College Health Assessment (NCHA), the American College Health Association (ACHA) continues to report increases of college student stress year after year (ACHA-NCHA, 2018; ACHA-NCHA, 2015; ACHA-NCHA, 2012).

Although some stress can be beneficial (Hales, 2009; National Institute of Mental Health, 2020), prolonged stress or intense levels of stress negatively affect individuals both physically and mentally (Acharya et al., 2018; Li, 2018; NIHM, n.d.; Sbarra & Coan, 2018; Uchino, 2004). The reality that high stress levels are an identified risk factor for developing mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety (Li, 2018; Regehr, Glancy, & Pitts, 2013; Watkins & Hill, 2016) raises concerns about the stress levels that college students experience.

Mental Health and University Students

Mental health issues impact one third of university students studying in the United States and Canada (Boak, Hamilton, Adlaf, Henderson, & Mann, 2018, Gallagher, 2014; Giamos, Lee, Suleiman, Stuart, & Chen, 2017; Ketchen Lipson, Gaddis, Heinze, & Eisenberg, 2015). Research during the past eight years consistently show an increased need for student psychiatric services within university counselling centers (Gallagher, 2014; Ketchen Lipson et al., 2015;

Kruisselbrink Flatt, 2013; Wood, 2012). Other studies indicate that mental health concerns for future university students in the United States and Canada are not diminishing. In fact, a recent study of over 10,000 students in Ontario in Grades 7-12 stated that 39% of students reported mild to moderate levels of psychological distress (Boak et al., 2018). This same study reported that 19% of these students would rate their mental health as poor, an increase from 11-13% in 2007 (Boak et al., 2018).

Alarmingly, the second leading cause of death for 15-24-year-olds in the United States and Canada is suicide (Navaneelen, 2016; Wilcox et al., 2010). Additional studies identified that students who have a mental illness are at a higher risk for suicidal behavior (CAMH, 2018; Keyes et al., 2012; Rivero et al., 2014).

Post-secondary mental health and wellness centers struggle to keep up with an increasingly difficult demand for mental health services (Gallagher, 2009; Gallagher, 2014). According to a study of mental health professionals who work with university students, "89.4% of respondents believed there had been an increase in students with severe psychological problems over the past five years; 55.7% reported an increase in self-injury such as cutting, and 70.6% reported an increase in crisis situations requiring an immediate response" (Gallagher, 2009, as cited by Cleary, Walter, & Jackson, 2011, p. 251).

Although the need for mental health services overwhelms counseling centers, not every student who experiences a mental illness chooses to access help (Downs & Eisenberg, 2012; Eisenberg, Downs, Golberstein, & Zivin, 2009). One study noted that 42.7% of undergraduate students who reported that they "felt so depressed that it was difficult to function" within the last 12 months, only 18% sought out a diagnosis or treatment (ACHA-NCHA, 2018, p. 14). In a survey by Blanco et al. (2008), just under 50% of college-aged students presented with a mental

health disorder, but only one quarter of those students – less than 13% of survey participants – accessed professional treatment within the previous year.

Managing Emotions

In exploring conditions contributing to the mental health of university students, studies over the past two decades demonstrated that the ability to manage emotions (emotion regulation) significantly impacts a student's mental well-being (Chickering, 1969; Elhai, Hall, & Erwin, 2018a; Lundin et al., 2017; Postareff, Mattsson, Lindblom-Yliann, & Hailikari, 2017; Rozgonjuk & Elhai, 2019a). Managing emotions is the ability to identify, express, and integrate emotions (Chickering, 1969). A student's inability to complete the process of managing emotions can lead to a lack of a sense of well-being and mental health issues (Gross, 2015; Desteno, Gross, & Kubzansky, 2013; Sbarra & Coan, 2018). Gross (2015) expanded the idea of managing emotions to include five different methods to regulate emotions: "situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation" (p. 7). The emotion regulation strategy of cognitive change includes the concept of reappraisal; reappraisal refers to the process through which an individual gains a different perspective or meaning as to how to view a situation, experience, or emotion (Gross, 2015). The process of reappraisal positively addresses mental health concerns (DeSteno et al., 2013; Gross & Levenson, 1997; Hoffner & Lee, 2015).

Managing Emotion and Social Connection

Gross (2015) identified the feedback loop as an important aspect of reappraisal within the emotion regulation process. The feedback loop occurs when one person receives feedback immediately through both verbal and non-verbal information after sharing a significant event or emotion with another individual or group. Increasingly, feedback received by young adults is

limited to unidimensional information, such as a text or a picture. In this regard, current research raises a particular concern by suggesting a correlation between an increased use of communication technology and mental health issues of students in late adolescence (Elhai, Levine, O'Brien, & Armour, 2018c; Twenge, 2017; Twenge, Martin, & Campbell, 2018). Additional studies expand this concern by noting that the mere presence of mobile phones hinders the quality of face-to-face communication (Misra, Cheng, Genevie, & Yuan, 2014; Przybylski, & Weinstein, 2012).

Social Connections and Use of Technology

Increasingly, students use their smartphones to connect with others (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010; Smith, 2017) and to manage their emotions (Elhai & Contractor, 2018; Elhai et al., 2018a; Elhai et al., 2018c, Eonta et al., 2011; Turkle, 2011). As students increase their utilization, comfort, and dependency on their smartphones, researchers explore how this increased use of technology can impact students' mental health (Billieux, Maurage, Lopez-Fernandez, Kuss, & Griffiths, 2015; Darcin et al., 2016; Elhai, Dvorak, Hall, & Levine, 2016; Elhai, Dvorak, Hall, & Levine, 2017a; Elhai, Hall, & Erwin, 2018; Hoffner & Lee, 2015; Lopez-Fernandez, Honrubia-Serrano, Freixa-Blanxart, & Gibson, 2014; Twenge, Martin, & Campbell, 2018). Elhai and Contractor (2018) surveyed 296 U.S. college students to understand the relationship between category of smartphone use (heavy or light, as dictated by frequency of use) and emotion regulation, specifically rumination (overthinking), suppression, and reappraisal (reframing). The study found that more frequent smartphone use correlated with stronger levels of rumination and reappraisal; whereas less frequent smartphone use did not correlate with suppression.

Although these studies are beneficial, additional research that explores best practices related to addressing the needs for mental health services among university students could provide further insights into student well-being, success, and retention. For example, in their review of studies that explored help-seeking behaviors among university students and the factors that influence students to seek help for mental health issues, Hunt and Eisenberg (2010) concluded that more research is still needed. They remarked that researchers have not thoroughly considered "contextual factors such as peer support, residential settings, and the supportiveness of academic personnel would affect student mental health" (p. 7).

Social Connection Change Due to COVID-19

In the late winter/early spring of 2020, a worldwide event occurred that caused a major disruption for many university students as they lost the ability to connect face-to-face with their peers, their residential communities, and their formal academic and mental health supports. A novel coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, spread from China into countries around the world, including the United States and Canada. As COVID-19 spread globally, its high infection and mortality rates (CDC, 2020a) raised deep concerns, leading the World Health Organization to designate COVID-19 as a global pandemic on March 11, 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020).

As the world scrambled to create response strategies, many states within the United States issued "stay at home" orders – a mandate that restricts persons from leaving their home except for essential reasons such as shopping for food or medicine, or work for those whose work was deemed essential (CNN, 2020). In response to the pandemic and restrictions imposed by various government and health officials, administrators in higher education institutions within the United States responded to the impending concern of the COVID-19 virus by moving classes

online and by requiring many students who were living in campus residences to move off-campus.

In many cases, students in residence had only a brief number of days to make alternative living arrangements and reconfigure their plans for the rest of the semester. On March 11, 2020, ABC University (a pseudonym) informed students by email that, due to concerns associated with the COVID-19 virus, all classes would be moved online effective March 16, 2020, and encouraged students to move home, if possible. This email also stated that the University hoped to resume in-person instruction and to welcome students back to campus by April 13, 2020. However, as additional information regarding this novel coronavirus surfaced, ABC University sent another email to students five days later (March 18, 2020) requiring all students to move off-campus within the next few days unless it was unsafe or impossible for them to do so. The school informed students that all course instruction would continue online for the remainder of the semester.

Statement of the Problem

Under normal circumstances, many university students experience high stress levels and mental health difficulties (Acharya et al., 2016; Cleary et al., 2011; Galatzer-Levy & Bonanno, 2012; Hales, 2009; Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009; Kruisselbrink Flatt, 2013; Li, 2018). Additionally, many university students were not accessing mental health services before the pandemic began (Blanco et al., 2008; Eisenberg et al., 2012; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). Moving classes online and closing student residences created new, significant sources of stress beyond what is typical for university students (Bland, Melton, Welle, & Bigham, 2012). With the rapid spread of COVID-19, government officials restricted in-person gatherings and many states issued stay at home orders. These limitations caused universities, such as ABC University, to close on campus

residencies and move courses completely online. University students had little time to make alternative housing arrangements, learn and adapt to new digital learning platforms, and to adjust to depending even more heavily on technology for communication, social connection, and mental health services. Within this context, this research project was prompted by questions concerning the well-being of students and the experience of students who had lived in campus residences who suddenly moved away from campus due to COVID-19.

Significance of the Study

This study is important and timely because the impacts of abruptly leaving campus on students' social support networks and academic routines are unknown. Research has yet to address the well-being of students who left campus after the university's transition to online teaching in March of 2020. As noted by the American College Health Foundation, mental health concerns such as depression and anxiety have already been increasing for college students over the last eight years (ACHA-NCHA, 2008; ACHA-NCHA, 2012; ACHA-NCHA, 2018; Gallagher, 2009; Gallagher, 2014). Mental illness impacts retention rates for higher educational institutions as many students feel they cannot manage their mental illness and complete their coursework. In 2018, the National Alliance of Mental Health released a report indicating that up to 64% of higher education students who drop out of college do so for mental health reasons (NAMH, 2018). A university education predicts long-term wealth and career opportunities (Ma, Pender, & Welch, 2016); therefore, the possibility of increased mental health problems during higher education can have long-term impacts (Dudovitz et al., 2016).

Not only does mental illness impact students and higher education institutions, mental health problems among university students contribute to an ongoing financial burden. Accounting for adjustment to quality of life, the estimated annual cost of mental health related to

loss of work and the cost of the provision of care in Canada is now over 50 billion dollars (Lim, Jacobs, Ohinmaa, Schopflocher, & Dewa, 2008). A study by the National Institute of Health found that unearned income in the United States due to mental health problems was over 193 billion dollars annually (National Institute of Health, 2008).

Even before the major disruption of the pandemic and classes moved online, research demonstrated that many university students are ill-equipped to manage the emotions surrounding transitions associated with university (Acharya et al., 2016; Cleary et al., 2011; Giamos et al., 2017; Keyes, Shmotkin, and Ryff; 2012; Kruisselbrink Flatt, 2013; Shepherd & Edelman, 2009). The reality of increased mental illness is partially evidenced by the increasing rate at which universities are being inundated with requests for mental health services and academic accommodations (Gallagher, 2014; Ketchen Lipson et al., 2015; Shepherd & Edelman, 2009; Wood, 2012). Kruisselbrink Flatt (2013) described numerous reasons why mental illness may be increasing among university students, including academic competition, rising costs of higher education, which lead to additional financial burdens, and an increased use of technology. If students were already struggling with stress and mental health while they were on campus, how are they doing now? How has moving away from campus impacted students? The research question that will drive this project is: What is the lived experience of residential students of a mid-west university who have moved away from residence because of COVID- 19?

This study used a qualitative action research design (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011; Merriam & Tisdall, 2016) that borrows from phenomenological methodology (Creswell, 2009; Merriam & Tisdall, 2016; Patton, 2015). Using a semi-structured interview format, the inquiry focused on students' perceptions of their relationships, academic functioning, and mental well-being after experiencing a major disruption by moving away from campus due to COVID-19.

The participants were recruited from a private, faith-based school located in the midwestern United States. I chose ABC University was chosen because I work in its residence life department and action research is intended to improve a community's practices, in this case, that includes the practice of supporting students at ABC University (Coghlan, 2007; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011; Merriam & Tisdall, 2016). As such, this project's recommendations have been written with direct application for ABC's student life staff, while maintaining an outlook for implications for counselors, social workers, academic success partners, and other student life professionals serving students at other higher educational institutions. The study provides a glimpse into the experiences, thoughts, feelings, and insights of students who have left campus, provides initial insights into students' emotional experiences that should be considered in a return to campus, and offers ideas as to how to provide ongoing support for students engaging in remote education.

Definition of Terms

COVID-19 - The name given by the World Health Organization to the 2019 strand of the novel coronavirus that the general public became aware of in the winter of 2019 (Johns Hopkins Medical, 2020).

Emotion Regulation –A process used to recognize and process emotions that are experienced, either through active or passive choices. When emotion regulation is employed, the effect of the emotion can be modified, delayed, intensified, diminished, or prolonged (Gross, 2015).

Home – Home is defined as the space away from campus where students relocated due to COVID-19 where they resided at the time of the study.

Mediated Communication – This term refers to any communication that is mediated or delivered

through a device, such as phone, laptop, or personal computer. Examples would be texting, chatting on social media sites, or using applications such as Instagram.

Mental Illness/problem – According to the American Psychiatric Association, mental illnesses "are health conditions involving changes in emotion, thinking or behavior (or a combination of these). Mental illnesses are associated with distress and/or problems functioning in social, work or family activities" (American Psychiatric Association, 2018, para 1).

Mental Well-being – The U.S. Health Department of Health and Human Services describes mental health as the following: "Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices" (U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services, 2018, para 1).

Non-mediated Communication –Any communication that occurs without a barrier or device used to transmit the communication. Any communication that takes place in-person is non-mediated communication.

Reappraisal – Reappraisal is a process of emotion regulation, which includes interpreting a situation, event, or feeling in a new way or assigning the stimulus new meaning (Gross, 2015). This process of reappraisal usually occurs with external input (Coan & Maresh, 2015; Sbarra & Coan, 2018).

Rumination –A process in which an individual continually thinks about an occurrence or idea, usually associated with dwelling on a negative idea or thought (Elhai & Contractor, 2018; Gross, 2015)

Social Networking Sites –An online platform that allows users to create their own individual

profile which can connect with others' profiles over the internet. Most often used to establish or maintain personal or social connections. Sometimes referred to as SNS.

Social Support – Social support is defined as relationships with others in which an individual feels they can share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences and feel a sense of belonging and significance (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Thoits, 2011).

Stay at Home Order – A stay at home order is issued by the governor of a particular state. States have the authority to determine to what degree, if any, residents are restricted to their homes (with the exception of essential travel and functions) as well as what businesses may remain open (CDC, 2020b).

Stress - Stress is defined as the body's response to change. The response can occur physically, emotionally, and/or mentally (NIMH, n.d).

Student development theory – Student development theory is a collection of theories and studies that explores the developmental growth and progression of college students, particularly those engaged in post-secondary studies. These theories provide guidance and best practices for student life professionals (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016).

Student persistence – Student persistence indicates a student's willingness to stay engaged in academics even when difficulties arise. Student persistence usually refers to the motivation and decisions made to see a goal through to completion, typically degree or program completion (Tinto, 1997).

Suppression – An emotion regulation strategy in which an individual chooses to mask or actively deny particular expressions of emotion (Gross, 2015).

Traditional age university students – Students who attend college or university directly after highschool, typically age 17-23.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Beginning with an explanation of the theoretical framework of personality and identity which guide this study, Chapter 2 reviews existing literature on college students and stress, on mental health concerns of college students, and the importance of strong social support networks for college students, and the social and academic impacts of learning online. Then, the literature review explores research regarding student mental health and technology use, which includes both the mental health concerns and benefits of students' interactions with technology as they adapt to online learning.

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology of the current study. This chapter includes a brief discussion of researcher bias, settings, and study protocols. The chapter then details the recruitment process and lists participant information. The data collection and analysis processes are also described. Chapter 3 then reviews the trustworthiness measures. Finally, Chapter 3 explores the limitations, assumptions, and ethical considerations of the study.

Chapter 4 begins with short biographies of the participants, shares students' initial reactions to the news of being required to move off campus, then discusses themes that emerged from the participant interviews. Chapter 4 concludes with establishing research connections to current literature, such as research regarding change theory and concerning mental health and use of technology.

Chapter 5 contains personal reflections as well as an examination of researcher biases. This project concludes with specific recommendations for ABC University that have potential to be applied more broadly for personnel in higher education as they consider necessary supports for students who have experienced a major disruption. Specific recommendation include how to support students for both on-campus residential programming and remote learning.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

College students continue to experience increased levels of stress, depression, and anxiety, which can lead to academic, physical, and mental health issues (ACHA-NCHA, 2018; ACHA-NCHA 2012; Acharya et al., 2016; Cleary et al., 2011; Wallace, Boynton, & Lytle, 2017). These mental health issues continue to rise for college students (ACHA-NCHA, 2018; ACHA-NCHA 2012) and universities are struggling to accommodate the rising needs of students (Gallagher, 2009; Gallagher, 2014; Wood, 2012). A critical aspect of managing these mental health challenges is a student's ability to regulate their emotions (Chickering, 1969; Gray, 2014; Gross, 2015). Regulating emotions through reappraisal, rather than suppressing those emotions, is viewed as one of the most effective ways of managing emotional health (DeSteno, Gross, & Kubzansky, 2013; Hoffner & Lee, 2015). In this regulating process, literature indicates that people highly benefit from a strong social support network (Gosnell, 2019; Kawachi & Berkman, 2001). For young adults in particular, a community of support serves as a protective factor against mental health concerns, such as anxiety and depression (Beam & Kim, 2020; Bland et al., 2012; Thoits, 2011).

Increasingly, students are turning to technology, including their smartphones, to connect socially with others (Oulasvirta, Rattenbury, Ma, & Raita, 2012; Smith, 2017; Rideout et al., 2010). Current research explores possible connections between smartphone use and psychopathology, such as depression and anxiety (Elhai & Contractor, 2018; Elhai et al., 2018a; Elhai et al., 2018c, Eonta et al., 2011; Rozgonjuk, Levine, Hall, & Elhai, 2018; Twenge, Martin, & Campbell, 2018). However, other research indicates that certain technologies can be effective therapeutic tools when addressing particular mental health issues (Anthony, 2015; Benton, Heesacker, Snowden, & Lee, 2016; Barak, Hen, Boniel-Nissim, & Shapira, 2008). In light of

these observations, this literature review explores a theoretical framework for the importance of emotion regulation through relationships, describes the changing mental health needs of college students, discusses the impact of stress on college student mental health, provides an overview stress and emotion regulation, identifies patterns related to college students and help seeking behaviors, mental health and social supports, explores impacts of mediated communication, examines benefits of in-person communication, and reviews benefits of online therapeutic interventions.

Theoretical Framework

The research for this study is grounded in personality theory, student development theory, and social baseline theory. These theories emphasize the importance and necessity of healthy human relationships for mental well-being.

Personality theory. Alfred Adler (1870-1937), an Austrian psychologist, theorized that many mental health issues have a basis in dysfunctional social interactions (Ansbacher, 1992). Adler stipulated that many of the psychological issues humans face is due to the way that they relate to each other. According to Adler, an individual's mental health and well-being connects to having something meaningful to do (occupation) and having intimate relationships, such as marriage. For Adler, well-navigated social connections, meaning overcoming one's inferiority complex and establishing rich social connections, equaled positive mental health. To state it another way, Adler's perspective can be summarized by saying that good mental health depends on the ability to love well and live well (Ansbacher, 1992).

Identity theory. Developmental psychologist Erik Erikson (1902-1994) took Alder's theory of personality, particularly the idea of inferiority, one step further and outlined eight developmental "tasks": (a) trust vs. mistrust, (b) autonomy vs. shame/doubt, (c) initiative vs.

guilt, (d) industry vs. inferiority, (e) identity vs. role confusion, (f) intimacy vs. role confusion, (g) generativity vs. stagnation, and (h) ego integrity vs. despair (Erikson, 1994). Erikson theorized that mental wellness and life satisfaction occurs when people navigate and move through each developmental task successfully. According to Erikson, identity formation plays a key role in an individual's life until they reach adolescence and young adulthood. As such, college staff and support personnel need to have a deep understanding of the developmental needs of college students, especially since identity formation and relational development are so critical for emerging young adults.

Student development theory. Expanding on these personality theories, Chickering (1969) narrowed the focus to college students with a working assumption that a typical college student will be a young adult who is in their late teens to mid-twenties. Similar to Erikson (1994) Chickering (1969) discussed seven different "vectors" or tasks that, when navigated, all contribute to identity development:

- developing competencies (cognitive, physical, and social),
- managing emotions (identifying, expressing, and integrating emotions),
- developing independence and interdependence,
- developing mature interpersonal relationships,
- developing a sense of identity,
- developing a sense of purpose, and
- developing integrity (Chickering, 1969).

Alder (2010), Erikson (1994), and Chickering (1969) would concur that healthy identity development is seen as a marker for psychological well-being.

In their exploration of mental health, some researchers use the term "psychological well-being" (Ryff & Keyes, 1995, p. 719). Psychological well-being can be defined in different ways. Keyes et al. (2012) defined psychological well-being using six dimensions, including self-acceptance, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, autonomy, purpose in life, and personal growth (p. 1008). These criteria for psychological well-being echo many of Chickering's student development vectors, but notably, the task of managing emotions is not listed.

Filling this gap, professor and practicing psychologist Gross (2002) researched the importance of managing emotions, also known as regulating emotions, and its connection with mental well-being. Gross and Levenson (1997) suggested that there is a strong connection between the difficulty with regulating emotions and psychopathology: "Indeed, by one count, over half of the nonsubstance related Axis I clinical disorders and all of the Axis II personality disorders involve some form of emotion dysregulation" (p. 95).

Social baseline theory. Healthy regulation of emotion does not happen in isolation; the regulation of emotion is dependent on another person's involvement (Coan, 2010; Cowan, Vanman, & Neilson, 2014; Sbarra & Coan, 2018). From a young age, individuals seek relationships where attachment can be formed and where both physical and emotional needs are met (Coan, 2010; Coan & Maresh, 2015). In healthy relationships, attachment figures soothe another individual and assist in the regulation of emotions through proximity (Coan, 2010; Coan & Maresh, 2015; Sbarra & Coan, 2018).

Emotional behavior strongly connects to social behavior (Adler, 2010; Beckes & Coan, 2011; Coan, 2010; Cowan et al., 2014; Sbarra & Coan, 2018). Beckes and Coan (2011) proposed the idea of social baseline theory, in which mammals establish attachments with others in their

species to assist in the regulation of emotion, in part by decreasing threats to safety through risk distribution and load sharing (Coan, 2010; Lougheed & Hollenstein, 2018). According to social baseline theory, risk distribution occurs when one individual is less likely to fall prey to a predator if they are in a group and load sharing entails sharing resources, sharing tasks, and having additional members watching for safety (Beckes & Coan, 2011; Coan, 2010).

Thriving research. The concept of thriving creates a framework for understanding well-being of students in higher education (Schreiner, 2010a, Schreiner, Louis, & Nelson, 2012). Drawing from literature in positive psychology and higher education theory, thriving measures three aspects of well-being: psychological, academic, and social (Schreiner, 2010a). As defined by Schreiner (2010a), the three areas of thriving also include subsections: psychological thriving includes a positive perspective and diverse citizenship, academic thriving includes engaged learning and academic determination, and social thriving includes the concept of social connectedness.

A positive perspective expands on the concept of resiliency, as indicated by student's continual effort even when situations or circumstances become difficult. As described by Schreiner (2010a):

> These students tend to take the long view of events, to see the bigger picture, to notice and remember the positives in others and in their environment, and to expect good things to occur in life . . . . they seek out information, take steps to ensure their success, reframe negative events so they see others' perspectives or can find something to be learned from the experience, use humor effectively to cope, and are quick to accept the reality of their situation. when they fail, they tell themselves it's a temporary setback and they look for what they can do differently next time to succeed. as a result of this outlook on life and

> its accompanying coping strategies, they experience more positive emotions and a higher level of satisfaction with their lives—as well as greater levels of success. Indirectly, this perspective leads to more effective problem solving, stronger relationships, and a more enjoyable college experience. (p. 6)

Diverse citizenship is defined by a student's ability to seek out and value different perspectives, and to participate in service to their community in order to contribute to the well-being of their environment (Schreiner, 2010c).

Academic thriving includes two distinct areas: engaged learning and academic determination. There are three aspects of engaged learning, which include "meaningful processing, focused attention, and active participation" (Schreiner, 2010b, p. 4). These elements of learning may include student practices such as talking with classmates about class material in informal settings, conducting further research, and asking thoughtful questions in class (Schreiner, 2010b). Even though engaged learning includes active participation, this engagement, is not always observable in classroom settings. For example, students may be deeply engaged in their learning but may not always participate in class discussions. Academic determination refers to four student behaviors or postures which include "(1) investment of effort, (2) self-regulation, (3) environmental mastery, and (4) goal-directed thinking" (Schreiner, 2010b, p. 7). Essentially, students with academic determination are open to feedback and learning from mistakes, take initiative and ask for help, take ownership of their learning and believe that their input impacts results, and create strategies to achieve their goals (Schreiner, 2010b).

The third area of the concept of thriving is social well-being. This particular area describes how connected students feel to others and how that sense impacts their social well-being. Schreiner (2010c) found that students themselves equated positive relationships with

thriving. For students, social thriving means "they have people in their lives who support them, listen to them, and spend time with them. they also feel they are a part of the campus community, recognizing that they matter to others on campus" (Schreiner, 2010c, p. 4).

Research using the framework of thriving focuses on three main areas: psychological, academic, and social well-being (Schreiner, 2010a; Schreiner, Louis, & Nelson, 2012). There are multiple factors that could impact students as they navigate the transitions of moving away from campus due to a major disruptor such as family support. Because not all of the participants moved back into their family system after they moved away from their on-campus community, the literature review focused on mental, social, and academic impact of the abrupt move away from campus to online learning.

Changing Mental Health Needs of College Students

The changing mental health needs of college students is significantly shaped by the changing demographics of those enrolling within higher education settings. Recent research indicates an increasing diversification and individualization of needs within the general population of higher education students. This section briefly considers research related to changing demographics of university students, student mental health needs, and mental illness among college students.

Changing demographics. The current mental health needs of higher education students have been significantly impacted by the shift in student demographics. In the United States, there were 19.8 million students who attended post-secondary education in the fall of 2017, of which three million were in post-baccalaureate programs (NCES, 2019). Students who may not have previously had an opportunity or the choice to attend college are now attending institutions of higher education. Student demographics are changing with more non-traditional students than

ever before (Hainline, Gaines, Long Feather, Padilla, & Terry, 2010; Selingo, 2013). Non-traditional students may face barriers that traditional students may not have in the past (Hainline et al., 2010; Iarovici, 2014) and universities are not always prepared to address unique needs of diverse populations. There has been a significant increase in both students of color (Iarovici, 2014; Cuyjet, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2011) and international students (Iarovici, 2014; Maffini, 2018). Post-secondary institutions have also seen an increase in enrollment of older, non-traditional students (Iarovici, 2014; Payne et al., 2017; Selingo, n.d.), veterans (Aikins, Golub, & Bennett, 2015; Payne et al., 2017), and first-generation students (Payne et al., 2017). Although this study focuses on a school with a significant traditional student enrollment, the school still experiences the trend of changing student demographics found in the broader higher education environment.

Impact on student mental health needs. As student demographics change, so do the needs that students present. A survey of recent articles published about student success indicates higher education institutions need to be attentive to a diverse array of student individualized needs. Recent studies explored the needs of university students who are on the autism spectrum (Mulder & Cashin, 2014), students with disabilities (Dryer, Henning, Graham Tyson & Shaw, 2016), students coming from the foster care system (Geenen, Powers, & Phillips, 2014; Watt, Faulkner, Bustillos, & Madden, 2018), and students who identify as sexual minorities (Barnes, Hatzenbuehler, Hamilton, & Keyes, 2013; Wolff, Himes, Soares, & Kwon, 2016). These studies point out that students with these experiences often have needs that challenge the traditional support systems available within higher education. As Altbach (2013) indicated "serving students from diverse backgrounds and generally without a high-quality secondary education is a challenge" (p. 22).

Research shows that nontraditional students need additional emotional and mental support to address their higher levels of anxiety and depression (Geenen et al., 2015; Maffini, 2018) and that students benefit from assistance creating social support networks (Dryer et al., 2016; Watt et al., 2018). As nontraditional college student enrolment continues to increase, including within on campus residential settings, student life support staff need to increase their awareness of the individualized needs that students present.

Mental illness on college campuses. Mental illness is "health conditions involving changes in emotion, thinking or behavior (or a combination of these). Mental illnesses are associated with distress and/or problems functioning in social, work or family activities" (American Psychiatric Association, 2018, para 1). College students' mental health continues to be an ongoing concern (CAMH, 2018; Gallagher, 2009; Giamos et al., 2017; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010; Iarovici, 2014; Ketchen Lipson et al., 2015; Kruisselbrink Flatt, 2013; Shepherd & Edleman, 2009; Wilcox et al., 2010; Wood, 2012). The American College Health Association reports that experiences of depression, anxiety, loneliness, and stress have all increased over the past six years (ACHA-NCHA, 2018; ACHA-NCHA, 2015; ACHA-NCHA, 2012).

Table 1

Reported Percentages of Undergraduate College Students' Mental Health Concerns (Within the last 12 months).

	Fall 2008	Fall 2012	Fall 2015	Fall 2018
"Overwhelming anxiety"	49.1%	50.6%	58.6%	62.9%
Overwhelming depression	30.6%	30.2%	36.1%	42.7%
Feeling very lonely	59.7%	57.5%	59.5.%	65.0%
"Tremendous" stress	9.3%	9.1%	11.1%	12.4%

(ACHA-NCHA, 2018; ACHA-NCHA, 2015; ACHA-NCHA, 2012; ACHA-NCHA, 2008)

A survey of U.S. colleges students indicated that approximately one third of students experience stress and just over a quarter report difficulty with sleep (ACHA-NCHA, 2008). Although within the overall United States population depression impacts one in five Americans (NAMI, 2020), 34.5% of college students report being impacted by depression to the point the individual found it "difficult to function" (Acharya et al., 2018, p. 655).

As levels of student depression and anxiety increase, the prevalence of suicidal ideation among students also increases (Ketchen Lipson et al., 2015; Rivero et al., 2014; Wilcox et al., 2010). Mental health is a concern for university students and administrators alike as there are over 1,000 suicides on college campuses every year (Cohen, 2007; Dyer, 2008; Rao, Taani, Lozano, & Kennedy, 2015). Suicide is now the second leading cause of death for U.S. college students (Wilcox et al., 2010). Based on face-to-face interviews with 1,253 college students, Wilcox et al. (2010) found that low social support was one of the main contributors to suicidal ideation.

A recent report from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) surveyed 5,470 people "to assess mental health, substance use, and suicidal ideation during the pandemic" (Czeisler et al., 2020, p. 1049). The researchers found that "symptoms of anxiety disorder, COVID-19-related TSRD [trauma-and-stressor-related disorder], initiation of or increase in substance use to cope with COVID-19-associated stress, and serious suicidal ideation in the previous 30 days were most commonly reported by persons aged 18-24 years" (Czesiler et al., 2020, p. 1051). The researchers concluded that mental health issues affect young adults more than other populations and reported that 25.5% of young adults have seriously considered suicide within the past 30 days (Czeisler et al., 2020).

The cumulative impact of these studies on changing student demographics, growing student mental health needs, and increasing mental illness on campus accentuates the urgency for higher education to create attentive and proactive responses. Developing and supporting such responses creates opportunities for increased student well-being, success, and retention for a diverse student population with individualized mental health needs.

Impact of Stress on College Student Mental Health

Researchers have noted that college is typically a time of high stress for students (ACHA-NCHA, 2018; Cleary et al., 2011; Keyes et al., 2012; Li, 2018). Approximately 40% of U.S. college students feel stressed at any given time (Acharya et al., 2018). The high stress of this life stage can contribute to emotional and physical health issues. Emotional issues connected with stress can include feelings of being overwhelmed, worried, frustrated, and incapacitated (Elhai et al., 2019b). Some studies suggested that prolonged exposure to stress may result in clinically diagnosable psychopathologies, including anxiety and depression (Hubbard, Reohr, Tolcher, & Downs, 2018; Li, 2018). Similarly, other studies observed that physical issues related to stress can emerge, with common symptoms such as headaches, stiffness, heart issues, cardiovascular strain, and gastrointestinal concerns (Li, 2018).

As previously noted, college students are particularly vulnerable to stress (Acharya et al., 2018; Wallace, Boynton, & Lytle, 2017). They may experience a wide range of stressors including financial pressures, feelings of loneliness and disconnection, pressure to keep scholarships and perform well academically, navigating interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships (Kruisselbrink, 2013) and being separated from their known sources of support (Acharya et al., 2018). When combined with poor sleep habits (Wallace et al., 2017), those enrolled in higher education appear to be quite vulnerable to high levels of stress.

Alongside other contributing factors to mental health status, such as biological, circumstantial, disposition, and changes in support system, high stress levels impact mental wellness. For example, Galatzer-Levy and Bonanno (2012) examined the impact of attachment and bonding patterns that influence students' ability to navigate stress related to college. Using Bowlby's theory of attachment, Galatzer-Levy and Bonanno (2012) conducted a four-year longitudinal study at a college in New York with 180 college students, studying distress levels, relationships, and ego-resiliency. Most students in the study experienced stress at predictable time periods but were able to navigate the stressful seasons. However, the researchers concluded that one out of ten students found college to be so stressful that their stress increased throughout the four years, rather than becoming more manageable (Galatzer-Levy & Bonnano, 2012).

Another researcher (Li, 2018) studied the effect of exam stress on the health of college students, using EEGs and neuroscience. Li found that "psychological stress is the main factor affecting people's health" (2018, p. 1547). Li (2018) also concluded that when high levels of stress exist and when students do not have the capability to manage stress levels, mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, may result.

Some researchers have shown that a positive social network can help with stress management. Uchino, Cacipppo, and Kiecolt-Glaser (1996) reviewed 81 studies to examine the connections between having access to a social support network and physical well-being. They found that having a social support network positively impacts the endocrine, immune, and cardiovascular systems. They also found that an effective social network included an element of emotional support, often familial support. The presence of a positive support network had an element of increasing a person's ability to reduce stress.

Viewed together, the research related to stress among college students depicts a scenario in which high stress level contribute to an increase incidence of mental health issues (Galatzer-Levy & Bonanno, 2012; Li, 2018; Uchino et al., 1996) and that emotion regulation strategies, particularly in the form of positive social networks, are a way of managing stress levels (Beckes & Coan, 2011; Elhai et al., 2018a; Elhai & Contractor, 2018).

Stress and Emotion Regulation

Research has formed around the topic of stress and emotion regulation. This section of the literature review introduces the concept of emotion regulation and discusses research related to the impact of reappraisal (one of the emotion regulation strategies) on stress.

Introduction to emotion regulation. Emotion regulation is a process used to recognize and process emotions that are experienced, either through active or passive choices. When emotion regulation is employed, the effect of the emotion can be modified, delayed, intensified, diminished, or prolonged (Gross, 1998; Gross, 2015). The process of regulating emotions may be controlled or may happen without conscious input from the individual (Gray, 2004; Gross, 1998).

According to Gross (2015), there are five methods of regulating emotions: situation selection, situation modification, attention deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation. Situation selection includes making decisions that will enhance one's own wellness by spending more time in situations that are positive and avoiding situations that may be negative. Situation modification is defined as trying to change an external or physical situation for the better. Examples might include making the best of a gloomy day or cleaning the house before guests come over. The third method, attention deployment, uses awareness to either avoid or more fully experience the present situation. Individuals either distract themselves to avoid

thinking of an unpleasant reality or possibility or they might employ a strategy like mindfulness, which might allow the individual to be more fully aware of the thoughts and feelings at any given moment (Elhai, Levine, O'Brien, & Armour, 2018; Williams & Penman, 2011).

The fourth and the fifth methods of emotion regulation involve expression of emotion. The fourth method, cognitive change, refers to deliberately rethinking and/or talking about a situation that causes an emotional response. Sometimes referred to as reappraisal, this process includes altering either the thought process about the event or altering the thought process about the impact of the event. For example, heightened test taking anxiety may be rethought of as extra adrenaline for taking the test. The student may mitigate the effect of the test taking fear by rationalizing how hard they studied and by how much effort they can do in the future.

The fifth and final method of emotion regulation is response modulation. Response modulation refers to both behaviors and thought processes that typically occur as the emotion occurs. Behaviors can include working out the emotion physically through mediation, monitoring the breathing, or through exercise. Thought process response modulation can also include suppression, which involves ignoring the emotion or limiting expression of emotion (Gross, 2015). Researchers indicate that suppressing emotions can lead to issues with heart rate and blood pressure (Gross, 2002; Gross & Levenson, 1997). An important aspect of regulating emotions is the expression of emotions. Expression of emotions and reception of another's emotions forms meaningful human connections (Adler, 2010; Coan, 2010; Gross, 2015).

Reappraisal and stress. Several studies show how the emotion regulation strategy of reappraisal helps manage stress (Beckes & Coan, 2011; Coan, 2010; DeSteno et al., 2013; Gross, 2002; Gross, 2015; Sbarra & Coan, 2018). According to Gross (2002), "reappraisal, involves changing how we think about a situation in order to decrease its emotional impact" (p. 281). This

reappraisal process allows people to become more aware of how their emotions fit within their current schema. Although reappraisal reduces emotional impact, suppression does not (Gross, 2002; Gross & John, 2003).

Table 2

Suppression and Reappraisal

	Affective	Cognitive	Social
Suppression	Decreased expressive behavior Raised cardiovascular system Reduced experience of positive emotion	Impact on verbal memory No impact on nonverbal memory	Increased blood pressure on the part of the conversation partner
Reappraisal	Decreased expressive behavior No impact on cardiovascular system	No impact on verbal memory	No impact on conversation partner

(Gross, 2002)

Mismanaging the regulation of emotions, such as suppressing emotions, can result in the development of Axis 1 disorders, like anxiety or depression, or even Axis II disorders or personality disorders, such as borderline personality disorder, histrionic disorder, narcissistic disorder or antisocial disorder (Gross & Levenson, 1997). This research concludes that suppressing emotions negatively impacts physical and mental health (Gross & Levenson, 1997).

Although reappraisal is an effective method of regulating emotions by some (DeSteno et al., 2013; Gross & Levenson, 1997; Hoffner & Lee, 2015), other researchers found alternate results. Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema, and Schweitzer (2010) conducted a meta-analytic review of emotion regulation strategies (acceptance, rumination, reappraisal, avoidance, problem solving, and suppression) and four areas of mental health dysfunction (anxiety, depression, substances, and eating irregularities). Aldao et al. (2010) evaluated 114 studies for a total of 214 effect sizes concluding that “a large effect size for rumination, medium to large for avoidance, problem

solving, and suppression, and small to medium for reappraisal and acceptance" (Aldao et al., 2010, p. 217). This study is important to consider as its findings are somewhat contradictory to the commonly held theory that Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, primarily based on reappraisal and acceptance, is perhaps not as effective as other regulation strategies (Aldao et al., 2010). However, the study was limited as the effect sizes for reappraisal and acceptance were the smallest effect sizes, which may inhibit the generalizability of the review's results.

College Students and Help Seeking Behavior

Counseling centers on university campuses are struggling to keep up with the demand. In a nationwide survey of college counseling centers, reported that almost 90% of counseling staff respondents believed that there had been a rise in serious mental health issues, approximately 55% reported an increase in deliberate self-injury, and just over 70% agreed that there was an increase in crisis care (Gallagher, 2009). A qualitative study including forty-one interviews with students, staff, and faculty discovered an increased need for accommodations for mental health issues. Although increasingly aware of and wanting to respond to mental health needs, campus professionals realize there is "not enough mental health infrastructure support on campuses" (Giamos et al., 2017, p. 121).

Even though college administrators feel overwhelmed by the demand for mental health services, not every student who needs help accesses help. A large quantitative study surveyed over 43,000 students at 72 campuses in order to explore which college students access help (Ketchen Lipson et al., 2015). The researchers examined mental wellness and institutional characteristics, such as enrollment size, private or public, graduation rates, admission rates, degree granting program, and predominantly residential or commuter population. This study also evaluated the types of mental health problems that are experienced by students along with which

students are accessing help. Research from this study indicated that just under 40% of the student population accesses mental health services (Ketchen Lipson et al., 2015). Hunt and Eisenberg (2010) also explored help seeking behavior and by reviewing literature regarding college mental health services and students help-seeking behavior. As referenced in their review, an earlier survey entitled *Healthy Minds* found that less than half of the students who screened positively for a mental health disorder such as depression or anxiety within the last year accessed help (Eisenberg, Golberstein, & Gollust, 2007). Hunt and Eisenberg (2010) found that some of the biggest barriers to students accessing help was a lack of student knowledge about the types of services offered, stigma, and wariness about whether or not counselling or other services would be even be helpful. In addition, students who were less likely to access help were non-domestic students and students from a lower socioeconomic background (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010).

Mental Health and Social Support

As social beings with a need for social support, people constantly seek, give, and receive feedback from others (Coan & Maresh, 2015). A large part of emotion regulation is a feedback loop, in which received information shapes how an event is processed. This feedback process can be internal, which does not involve another person, or external, which involves interaction with another person. Although Gross' (2015) research discussed the internal processes associated with the feedback loop and the reappraisal strategy, Coan and Maresh (2015) also noted that it is important to consider the role others and their physical presence play in the reappraisal process. In the context of the COVID-19 stay at home orders, during which in-person feedback loops were significantly reduced for university students, understanding how mental health is impacted by in-person and by mediated (or technology assisted) feedback becomes more important.

Impact of in-person support networks. In this context, eye contact, voice, and proximity are important considerations when exploring connections between mental health and the reappraisal process (Beckes & Coan, 2011; Coan, 2010; Coan & Maresh, 2015). For example, development theory describes the importance of facial expressions for healthy development of infants and toddlers (Holmes, 2001; Neath, Nilsen, Gittsovich, & Itier, 2013). Hoffner and Lee (2015) conducted one of the first studies to examine the correlations of smartphone use, emotion regulation, and well-being. They found the importance of in-person connections with the reappraisal process: "The fact that missing both social support and interpersonal contact was associated with greater use of reappraisal is consistent with evidence that others can help people reframe or reinterpret negative experiences" (p. 415). Twenge, Martin, and Campbell (2018) found that adolescents who spent more time engaging in-person activities were correlated with higher happiness and self-esteem while "electronic communication was consistently correlated with lower happiness and self-esteem" (p. 9). Taken together, these researchers show the importance of in-person support networks for positive mental health under ordinary development circumstances.

Social support as protective factor. Social support, in the form of friendships, is a protective factor for university students (Bland et al., 2012; Drouin et al., 2018; Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009; Watkins & Hill, 2016). The social connections that students create with peers provide a buffering effect (Cohen & Willis, 1985) against mental health issues (Bland et al., 2012). The social connections benefit individuals when they are stressed and feeling overwhelmed as well as at times when they are not. In both cases, friends positively influence students' well-being (Bland et al., 2007; Cohen & Willis, 1985; Thoits, 2011).

Drouin et al. (2018) indicated that 34% of the respondents were at risk for depression and anxiety and just the idea of perceived support can be helpful to students (Drouin et al., 2018). Social support and perceived social support not only assist with actual stress, but healthy relationships also assist with the interpretation of situations that might lead to stress (Cohen & Willis, 1985; Watkins & Hill, 2016). Watkins and Hill (2015) found that "increased social support may lead to more healthy interpretations of stressors and, in turn, decreased stress, a finding that has important theoretical implications and practical applications for counseling interventions and mental health promotion on college campuses" (p. 159).

Bland et al. (2012) explored the coping strategies utilized by 248 college students who attended a midsize southern university. Researchers found 29 different coping mechanisms. Of the 29 trategies, only six of them were protective factors and of those six factors, only one was a significant protector factor for high stress tolerance, which was "felt supported by family, friends, and teachers" (Bland et al. 2012, p. 372).

Moreover, researchers show that these social support networks have a positive effect on a student's academic well-being. Strong social support from friends in school results in a strong affiliation with the school itself and improves student's experience of academics (Buote et al., 2007; Gosnell, 2019). Along with developing a strong school affiliation, students have a better perception of their in-class experience if they feel the classroom itself is a source of social support (Gosnell, 2019). Nicpon et al. (2006) found that increased social connection also impacted retention rates.

Social support as community. One helpful way to understand how these social support networks provide this protective layer for university students involves examining the concept of

community more closely. Sarason (1974) described a psychological sense of community this way:

> Psychological sense of community, a construct developed in the discipline of community psychology, has been defined as the perception of similarity to others, an acknowledged interdependence with others, a willingness to maintain this inter-dependence by giving to or doing for others what one expects from them, and the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure. (p. 157)

By framing community this way, Sarason (1974) describes an interdependent feedback loop, where the community's participants assist each other in developing healthy emotion regulation.

Expanding on Sarason's (1974) description, McMillan and Chavis (1986) define four essential elements of community: "membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and emotional connection" (p. 9). Membership refers to a sense of belonging to the group and indicates certain group boundaries of who might identify with the group and who might not. Influence refers to members' ability to influence the group as well as the group's ability to influence the individual. Integration and fulfilment indicate that membership in the group benefits individuals in some way.

Thoits (2011) explained that communities that provide social support do so in three capacities: "emotional, informational, and instrumental assistance" (p. 146). Emotional support is provided by others in the community who listen to concerns, give encouragement, provide moral support, and offer sympathy to the individual (Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000; Thoits, 2011). Information assistance refers to sharing facts or data which may be useful to the other as well as referring to feedback which may assist the individual with decision-making

(Thoits, 2011). The third category, instrumental assistance, means sharing material or practical advice (Thoits, 2011).

The fourth aspect of community given by McMillan and Chavis (1986) is emotional connection. Emotional connection is partially founded on a shared history and the following elements may strengthen the ties of the group: frequency of connection, depth of connection, clarity of relationship and role, shared experiences, level of emotional risk, how members of the group are treated, and a potential spiritual bond (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Communities or support networks can be defined by a number of variables, such as the number of members, the amount of interactions they have with each other and the frequency of those interactions, the degree of closeness that they feel, the extent to which members are like each other, the varying degrees of types of interactions they have with each other, how long they have known each other, and the degree to which there is mutuality within the group (Berkman et al., 2007).

For this study, participants identified with being a part of the same school community and residence hall community. Each residence hall houses anywhere from 240 to 360 students when at full capacity. Different floors within each hall develop their own identity and community. Buote et al. (2007) and Walker (2017) indicated that students who live in on campus residences have a greater sense of psychological belonging than students who commute from off-campus. Developing friends to assist with transitions is critical for well-being and stress reduction (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2011; Buote et al., 2007; Chickering, 1969; Watkins & Hill, 2016).

For university students, many transition their emotional bonds from family and high school friends to friends they find in college (Chickering, 1969; Erikson, 1994; Palladino Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994). As listed by Buote et al., (2007), college friends serve a number

of roles, including the capacity to "provide a sense of belonging, give both emotional support and tangible assistance when needed, offer advice and counsel, and serve as role models with regard to appropriate behavior in the campus environment" (p. 686). College friends also expand social networks, normalize behavior, and provide stress relief through having a good time together (Buote et al., 2007). These new-found, imperative friendships, often formed within the layers of community available through on campus residential contexts, can serve as a support mechanism and protective factor against stress and mental health issues. The insights from this study raise significant questions about the impact on students who had to return home after establishing a social support network with their peers.

Absence of social support and mental health. Although a strong sense of community and social support are positively correlated to a better sense of mental well-being (Beam & Kim, 2020; Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009; Watkins & Hill, 2016), when social support and a sense of community is not present, participants experienced isolation and loneliness, which are related to psychological distress (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009; Kawachi & Berkman, 2001). Mental health issues correlated with a lack of support can also include thoughts of suicide, eating disorders, and deliberate self-injury (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009). Their conclusions raise significant concerns about student mental health well-being in the context of university's closing on campus residences during the COVID-19 pandemic, during which students had to quickly leave the in-person communities in which they had been participating.

Social and Academic Impact of Online Learning

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, of the almost twenty million (19.8) students enrolled in higher education in the United States in 2018, one third of those students were taking classes exclusively online. In the United States, there is an average of 20%

lower completion rates for online courses and the attrition rate can be as high as six or seven times the attrition rate for onsite courses (Britto & Rush, 2013). Research also indicates that students who feel connected to course material, to fellow classmates, and to faculty are more likely to complete the course and have a higher satisfaction rate (Britto & Rush, 2013; Buelow et al., 2018; Dixson, 2010). Buelow et al. (2018) recently summarized the National Survey of Student Engagement which summarized five academic components of the student's engagement with learning: appropriate level of challenge, supportive campus environment, fulfilling educational experiences, the interaction with faculty, and collaborative and interactive learning.

One of the primary reasons students drop out of online courses is because they do not feel connected to their course material, their peers, or their faculty (Bailey & Brown, 2016; Buelow et al., 2013; Dixson, 2010). Although students enjoy the freedom and independence of being able to schedule their own school hours and programs, it can come with a cost of feeling isolated, alone, and unsupported (Bailey & Brown, 2016). Current research, including looking at the successful models of Lone Star College, Grand Canyon University, and South New Hampshire University, have led to the conclusion that no matter how large or virtual the class may be, students still crave and require connection (Britto & Rush, 2013; Buelow et al., 2018; Dixson, 2010; Horn & Dunagan, 2018; Martin, 2019). Utilizing the thriving framework for students in higher education, questions arise regarding what an engaged learner looks like when transitioning to an online format and how does moving online so abruptly impact social connectedness.

Mediated Communication

Increasingly, students turn to technology to connect socially with one another and to manage their emotions (Elhai & Contractor, 2018; Elhai et al., 2018a; Elhai et al., 2018c, Eonta et al., 2011; Turkle, 2011). Smartphone use increased dramatically over the past 10 years, with

smartphone ownership just over 94% of 18-29 years old in the United States (Smith, 2017). A study of younger students indicated that youth age 13-18 spend an average of just under nine hours a day using recreational media (Rideout et al., 2010). Smartphone use rose exponentially within the last seven years. Kim, Wang, and Oh (2016) indicated that in 2014, 98% of young adults between the ages of 18-29 had their own cell phone. According to Pew research in 2017, 77% of American adults owned a smartphone of some kind, up from 35% in the spring of 2011 (Smith, 2017). This same research indicated that in 2017, 100% of all surveyed Americans age 18-29 owned a cellphone, 94% of whom owned smartphones.

Texting, rather than talking on the phone, has become a commonplace way to exchange information and to connect with others (Lenhart, 2012). In 2011, of the 83% of American adults who were cell phone owners, just under three quarters of them used the text feature as well (Smith, 2011). As part of a Pew Research Center project, 31% of those surveyed said they would rather text than speak to someone on the phone, while just over half said they still preferred a phone call to a text (Smith, 2011). Young adults surveyed strongly preferred texting by a significant margin. The increased adoption of technology by university students to facilitate engagement within their social networks raises questions regarding the impact on their mental health.

Impact of technology on mental health. Researchers find that overuse of the smartphone connects to stress, anxiety, and depression (Elhai et al., 2018a; Kwon, Kim, Hyun, & Yang, 2013; Rozgonjuk, Levine, Hall, & Elhai, 2018). Twenge et al. (2018) described how smartphone use may connect with psychological well-being. Using the data taken from *Monitoring the Future*, a national survey of 8th, 10th, and 12th graders on topics such as self-esteem, self-satisfaction, domain satisfaction, life satisfaction, and happiness, the authors note

that psychological well-being has declined for adolescents since 2012 (Twenge et al., 2018), which is the year that smartphone ownership for this age bracket crossed over 50% (Twenge, 2017). Twenge et al. examined two possible correlations: increased smartphone use and economic changes (recession of 2008). Twenge's study revealed that economic changes did not have an impact, while increased use of the smartphone did. Twenge also discovered that non-screen activities were positively correlated with happiness, whereas screen-based activities were positively correlated with unhappiness. The implications of these findings raise substantive concerns regarding the long-term mental health impact on university students, particularly in circumstances where students shift suddenly from in-person to technology-based support networks.

Mediated communication and impact on relationships. Recognizing that mental well-being relates to healthy relationships (Adler, 2010; Coan & Maresh, 2015; Erikson, 1994), researchers continue to explore the impact of mediated communication and relationships. According to Huang (2017), who completed a meta-analysis regarding cell phone use and psychological well-being, there are four operating assumptions regarding smartphone use and relationships. First, use of smartphone and social networking sites enhances in-person relationships. The second assumption is that using social networking sites displaces in-person communication. In addition, people who identify as extraverts benefit from on-line interactions as it strengthens their off-line friendships, but introverts do not as they become lonelier and increasingly disconnected. Four, there is no impact at all. Studies exploring these four assumptions, along with a study proposing a fifth assumption, the Goldilocks theory (Przybylski &Weinstein, 2017), are discussed in greater detail below.

Enhancement theory. Regarding the enhancement theory, Valkenburg and Jochen (2007) studied students and found that online use enhanced youth's experience of their friendships. In a more recent study, Pollet, Roberts, and Dunbar (2011) found that use of a cell phone does not increase frequency or strength of off-line friendships. Pollet et al. (2011) surveyed 117 college students' connections between online and in-person social life and results suggest that those who use messaging or social media do not have closer in-person relationships, nor do they have a wider circle of friends. This study contrasts previous studies that indicated people who use social media sites or messaging have stronger offline friendships.

Displacement theory. The second theory, the displacement theory, received some attention in research studies as well. Laura and Chapman (2007) strongly asserted the reality of the displacement theory, saying that too much time on-line displaces off-line relationships, calling the love of the digital "the new assault on mental health in schools" (p. 80). Several studies indicated the presence of a mobile phone interferes with in-person relationships, such as studies by Przybylski and Weinstein (2012) and then the replication of that study by Misra, Cheng, Genevie, and Yuan (2016). Przybylski and Weinstein (2012) evaluated the impacts of the presence of a mobile phone on quality of interpersonal interactions. Seventy-four participants (37 dyads) participated in the study by spending time together and rating their experience of the in-person interaction. Some dyads had a cell phone present, the control group did not. The researchers concluded that the presence of a cell phone negatively impacted the formation of interpersonal relationships (partner trust, empathy), and this impact increases when personal subjects are discussed. Related to Przybylski and Weinstein (2012), Misra et al. (2016) examined the correlations with the presence of a smartphone and relationship satisfaction. The study evaluated 100 dyads during 10-minute conversations in a naturalistic setting. The researchers

concluded that the presence of a smartphone, even when it is not in use, negatively impacted the communication in a dyad by decreasing empathetic responses and a sense of connectedness. These feelings were more pronounced the closer the relationship between the study participants.

Theory of varying impact. Regarding the third assumption, some studies have found legitimacy in the idea that smartphone use impacts everyone differently. For example, Bodford, Kwan, and Sabota (2017) found that people with pre-existing mental health issues ascribe their issues to their smartphones, i.e. anxious humans have anxious attachments to their phones. Kim et al. (2016) surveyed college students finding that the more college students used their smartphones, the more they were involved in social activities.

Null theory. The fourth hypothesis, which states that there is no social impact either positively or negatively, has not been supported by many studies. However, some college students self-reported that they felt their use of the smartphone had both positive and negative social implications for them (Hudson, Fetro, & Bliss, 2012; Kim et al., 2016).

Goldilocks theory. Along with the four possible implications for technology use and relationships posited by Huang (2017), Przybylski and Weinstein (2017) forwarded a fifth hypothesis. This theory postulates a "Goldilocks" theory (p. 205), which stipulates that the use of smartphones can be beneficial, so long as they are used in moderation. Other studies indicated that use of smartphones can be beneficial when they are used for attention deployment (Hoffner & Lee, 2015) or used for supportive communication (Park & Lee 2012).

Researchers found that people's habits and behaviors change by their smartphone use (Tossel, Kortum, Shepard, Rahmati, & Zhong, 2015). This study followed 24 undergraduate students for a year, logging their usage of their smartphones. All students who participated in the study had never owned a smartphone before. The students were given a survey of their

perceptions of how using the smartphone would impact them before they began to use it, and then again after the year was over. The pre-survey and post-survey results were informational. Survey responses were based on a 5-point scale, ranging from a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). For the question: "My iPhone distracted me from school-related tasks", pre-survey was 1.91, post survey was 4.03. When asked "I always need to check my phone" pre-survey was 1.36, post survey was 4.25. This study is a great example of how behavior is impacted and changed by smartphone use. The study suggested that students who just began using a phone became much more dependent on the phone and that the phone use negatively impacted their academic habits. Arslan (2016) studied college students' behaviors once they switched from a classic cell phone to a smartphone and found that students socialized much less in-person and depended much more on their smartphone. Arslan observed that the phone was no longer seen as a tool, but as a purpose.

Benefits of In-person Communication

When communication takes on a two-dimensional form, as it does in mediated communication, aspects of the human exchange are lost. Cyr, Berman, and Smith (2015) explored the correlations of communication technology and identity development for high school adolescents and found that "when people cannot see or hear others with whom they are communicating, they are deprived of the visual and auditory cures of facial expression, body language, and voice dynamics that convey emotion and meaning" (p. 81). The social baseline theory posits that individuals need proximity to each other to thrive (Beckes & Coan, 2011; Coan, 2010; Coan & Maresh, 2015; Sbarra & Coan, 2018). Wagner (2015) affirmed Adler's theory of personality by suggesting in-person communication is superior to mediated communication:

> Science tells us that by using our five senses, people take in signals from another. Mirror neurons subsequently interpret these signals and become activated. The insula of the brain then responds to mirror neuron activation by altering the observer's limbic system and bodily state to match the other person's, thus facilitating empathy. We see that science is now proving what Adlerians have intuited for years: Sharing of community is what shapes us. (p.115)

Wagner's (2015) key insight is that human connection is enhanced when all five senses are engaged while interacting with other humans. Adding to this perspective, Wagner (2015) also asserts: "Furthermore, face-to-face communications give us something we lose in mediated communications: the ability to engage our five senses simultaneously" (p. 116). These observations raise questions about the emotion regulation impact on students when their interactions are reduced or restricted from in-person communication to mediated communication patterns that can engage only two of the five senses.

Important social cues and information are lost when people only communicate via devices. Cummings, Butler, and Kraut (2002) suggested that although communication via email and text have their place and can be useful, face to face communication is still preferred for relationship development. The study by Giamos et al. (2017) indicated some students feel the best coping mechanism they have is talking with someone face to face. The insights gained through these studies lend to a conclusion that the fullness of in-person communication provides for a healthier development of emotion regulation than does mediated communication.

Of particular concern is the impact on youth and adolescents, whose brains are still forming connections and building necessary pathways to be able to identify and process emotions. According to Blakemore (2008), "Some of these brain regions undergo substantial

development during adolescence, which has implications for the development of social cognition, in particular understanding other people" (p. 46). Gross (2015) recognized the need for further emotion regulation research, stating that there is much yet to be discovered about the relationship between affect and mental health issues.

Benefits of Using Technology as a Mental Health Intervention

Some research, however, indicates that there are potential benefits of using technology as a mental health intervention. The learning from these studies provides insight into how universities could develop mental health support structures for students who lose their in-person networks through circumstances like COVID-19.

Some researchers have established that technology can be used by professionals as a therapeutic tool (Anthony, 2015; Barak et al, 2008; Benton et al., 2016; Ben-Zeev et al., 2015; Travers & Benton, 2014). Initially, use of technology as a therapeutic tool was met with quite a few concerns, such as the removal of the non-verbal cues from the therapist, ethical issues when transmitting personal information over the internet, legal issues with jurisdiction and licensing, and concerns over differing experiences and with comfort levels of operation of technology (Barak et al., 2008). A meta-analysis, conducted in 2008, reviewed 64 different studies that studied the effectiveness of the use of technology as a therapeutic tool (Barak et al, 2008). The authors made several important distinctions when discussing technology as an intervention. One, is the technology being used in combination with face to face therapy or is it purely self-directed? Two, is the technological intervention being utilized asychronistically or synchronistically? And three, is the type of technological intervention text only (smartphone), audio only (voice call), or audio-visual (video session)? Using only studies that included some type of psychological intervention (not self-help studies), the study concluded that technological

therapy is effective and, on average, was just as effective as in-person therapy (Barak et al., 2008). Studies that demonstrated the most success included patients who presented with anxiety and stress, online therapy that was conducted for individuals (rather than in groups), and therapy that was conducted with text rather than not text (Barak et al., 2008).

Therapists also experimented with a combination of technology and face-to-face interventions. Richards and Simpson (2015) discussed a newer application, called goACT, which allows for interventions, such as therapist to patient text messaging, including setting the time the messages will be sent, one-way emails (from therapist to patient), two-way messages sent via the goACT account, and a place to document feelings or journal events of the day. Richards and Simpson (2015) continued by discussing the idea that past research has typically approached face to face interventions or interventions using technology as an either-or scenario. Using a mixed methods design, and a small sample (six patients over 12 weeks), the researchers concluded that the patients experienced a better quality and depth of face to face counselling by virtue of adding the additional technological intervention.

Some research suggests that technology can be used as a tool to enhance mental well-being, specifically addressing stress, depression, and anxiety (Anthony, 2015; Benton et al., 2016). Smartphones have recently begun to gain in popularity for accessing therapeutic applications. Apps such as *Mindshift* and *Self-Help for Anxiety Management* (*SAM*) are being recommended directly on University Counselling sites (Amherst College, n.d.; Middlebury, n.d.). New smartphone applications use data, such as location sensors, sleep data, and length of conversations as possible predictors of mental health issues, including loneliness, stress, or depression (Ben-Zeev et al., 2015; Sano et al., 2018). Li, Li, Wong, and Cao (2017) evaluated the effectiveness of using an application like *StudentLife* to evaluate withdrawal behaviors of

college students. The study additionally asked students to complete three self-reports: their daily stress level using a Likert scale, a Patient Health Questionnaire, and the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale. The application *StudentLife* has also been used in studies to observe changes in behavior over a semester to evaluate student sociability (Harari et al., 2017).

Therapist-Assisted online intervention (TAO) is a program that was developed to address two needs: one, to maximize therapist efficiency in light of the ongoing and increasing demands for mental health services for anxiety and mood disorders; and two, to respond to younger clients' desire for therapeutic service delivery options (Benton et al., 2016). A survey asked 217 university students to state which delivery mode of therapy they would prefer: face-to-face sessions, group therapy, or online therapy (Travers & Benton, 2014). Even though 70% of the respondents preferred face-to-face sessions, 16% of the respondents who had not been to the clinic before and 31% of the respondents who had been to the clinic before said they would be open to using Therapist-Assisted Online therapy. Students further stated that their preference would be to have video conferencing sessions, rather than a phone call or text (Travers & Benton, 2014). The Therapist-Assisted Online intervention consists both of modules clients need to complete, as well as weekly brief (10-15 minute) video chats with their therapist. One hundred and four clients participated in the study. At the end of the study, TAO was shown to be more effective than the traditional delivery mode of therapy (Benton et al., 2016).

The introduction of Therapist-Assisted Online programs raises an important question for researchers. Carlbring, Andersson, Cuipers, Riper, and Hedman-Lagerlof (2018) explored the effectiveness of mental health assistance delivered through technology by conducting a meta-analysis of internet-based verses face to face therapeutic intervention for sleep and mental health issue such as depression, anxiety, and phobias. Of the 2,078 reviewed articles, 20 of them met

the inclusion criteria with an *n*=1418. The reviewers ensured that the study included treatments that involved some level of therapist engagement. Internet-based cognitive behavior therapy was the primary treatment. Internet cognitive behavioral therapy consists of modules that were given to the client every week. Every week also includes communication with a therapist for 1-15 minutes per week (Carlbring et al., 2018). Carlbring et al. (2018) concluded that internet-based cognitive behavioral therapy was equally as effective as in-person cognitive behavioral therapy.

As noted, research indicated that technology can be used to accentuate therapeutic treatment and in some cases with certain presenting issues, has been effective as a stand-alone treatment. Smartphones have also been proven to be helpful for those who have a strong social connection to access and supplement those connections through texting and social media. However, more research is needed to understand the mental health and academic implications for students who have had to move to primarily digital communication for social connection and academic learning.

Conclusion

As evidenced by this literature review, college students are experiencing increasing amounts of stress, depression, and anxiety. Emotion regulation strategies positively impact mental well-being. Technology use for social connections continues to increase and research is beginning to explore both the mental health and personality factors that drive increased smartphone use, as well as the mental health implications for using the smartphone as a tool. However, in light of the abrupt changes due to COVID-19 and the necessity of moving most communication online, more research is needed regarding the impact of these changes on students who are accustomed to living in residence and taking in-person classes. This study contributes to research regarding how students experienced moving away from campus due to

COVID-19. Findings of this research provide greater understanding as to students' lived experiences, insight regarding considerations for a safe return to campus, and effective supports for students who may find themselves in a remote learning situation again.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The previous chapters offered examples from the literature that indicate that college students are vulnerable to increased stress. College students' mental health concerns continue to rise due to increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. As evidenced in the literature review, mental health research indicates that healthy emotion regulation, i.e. the ability to manage emotions, is a critical component of good mental health. Developmentally, students need to establish healthy interpersonal relationships as part of gaining healthy emotion regulation. The established relationships create the opportunity to regulate emotion through the process of reappraisal, in which an individual learns to view a situation or emotion through another lens.

The previous chapter also established that research is beginning to explore both the mental health and personality factors which drive increased technology use and the mental health implications for using technology as a tool to improve mental health. Relevant literature suggests that technology, including smartphones, can be used to both positively influence mental health and negatively impact mental health.

During the time of "stay at home," many college students find themselves in a unique scenario with limited communication options. Students, who lived in an on-campus residence with up to 250 other students, found themselves restricted to their residence and limited to communicating with friends and others from their university community via technology only. This study seeks to understand the lived experiences of students whose mode of communication and experience of community changed abruptly in the spring of 2020 as a result of COVID-19. Building on the foundation of this study's literature review, this chapter gives attention to the methodology that guided the research project.

Action Research with a Phenomenological Approach

To understand the experience of university students, a qualitative action research method was utilized. The purpose of the study was to understand the lived experiences of students who had moved away from campus due to COVID-19 so the action research design borrowed heavily from a phenomenological approach. Qualitative researchers are interested in knowing how individuals interpret their experiences, how they give meaning to what they experienced, and how their world is constructed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2009; Merriam & Tisdall, 2016). One form of phenomenological research is transcendental phenomenology, whose intent is to understand how a person or group makes meaning of a particular experience, event, program, culture, or feeling (Flipp, 2014c; Patton, 2015). Several assumptions underline phenomenological inquiry: an individual's interpretation of the experience is what is important, another's ability to understand an individual's experience can only come through in-depth interviewing and observation, and that "there is an essence or essences to a shared experience" (Patton, 2015, p. 116). Stated another way, if a researcher speaks to several individuals about a particular event, program, or culture, similar responses or feelings begin to emerge, which constitute the essence of the phenomenon.

Most phenomenological inquiry is conducted through in-person interviewing so an important aspect of the research is the researcher themselves as they serve as the primary instrument of inquiry (Merriam & Tisdall, 2016; Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) explained that "your background, experience, training, skills, interpersonal competence, capacity for empathy, cross cultural sensitivity, and how you as a person engage in fieldwork and analysis, these things undergird the credibility of your findings" (p. 3). The researcher and their experiences, training, and skills are such an essential part of the work so qualitative researchers engage in a process

called *reflexivity* (Flipp, 2014d; Merriam & Tisdall, 2016; Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Reflexivity asks the researcher to examine their own values, beliefs, or experiences which impact the interpretation of the data supplied by the participants (Patton, 2015). Bracketing and epoch are both part of the reflexivity process. Taken from the Greek, epoch means to "refrain from judgement" (Merriam & Tisdall, 2016, p. 27). As researchers conduct their inquiry, they must be careful not to allow their own biases or pre-conceived ideas block their ability to hear an individual's comments as they experience them. A qualitative researcher must also bracket, or suspend, their own feelings, values, experiences, and judgements to truly hear the other's experiences (Merriam & Tisdall, 2016; Patton, 2015). One can never completely set all assumptions or biases aside (Colaizzi, 1978; Merriam & Tisdall, 2016) so the bracketing process should be ongoing and active through the research process.

Action research is applied and discovery-oriented with a specific goal of addressing a concern within a researcher's own organization or community (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011; Merriam & Tisdall, 2016). One type of action research is first person action research. First person action research is sometimes referred to as insider research as practitioners conduct research themselves rather than those who are outside researchers (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). As a current employee of ABC University with over 20 years of working in residence life programs and a social work background, I understand the context about which I am inquiring about. However, having such personal working knowledge of ABC University and the residence life program means that I actively bracketed my own perceptions and assumptions to create space to listen to others' experiences. Although some action research investigates and documents change over time, this research project is limited to initial data gathering and making recommendations for change (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

This study explored the lived experiences of students who were living on campus in university residences but moved away from campus because of COVID-19. Specifically, the research explored how students adapted given the abrupt social and academic changes experienced during the 2020 spring semester.

Research Design

As explained previously, this action research project borrows heavily from phenomenological methods. The shared phenomenon experienced by participants is their experience of moving away from campus due to COVID-19. Action research, particularly within the education discipline, is "aimed at generating actionable knowledge, which can be defined as knowledge that is useful to both the academic and practitioner communities" (Coghlan, 2007, p. 293). Listening to student experiences of moving away from campus and moving to online classes may provide a greater understanding as to how to support the academic and social well-being of students as they transition back to campus or continue remote learning.

Given that the intent of this research was to hear the student's lived experiences, a semi-structured interview protocol was employed (Appendix A). The questions for the individual interviews were designed to be open ended, rather than highly structured, to allow for the participant to comment on what was most important to them (Creswell, 2009; Merriam & Tisdall, 2016). Based on Thriving research, questions focused on student perceptions of their mental, social, and academic well-being. The purpose of the questions was to explore how students were faring in the event of moving away from campus so a semi-structured interview protocol was chosen rather than leaving the interview time completely unstructured and open ended. Using a phenomenological semi-structured interview design allows students to share their

lived experience and give meaning to their current life circumstances (Bogden & Bilken, 2003; Creswell, 2009; Merriam & Tisdall, 2016). The initial interviews were conducted during a one-week time frame in May 2020, approximately two months after students had relocated away from campus.

Following the initial interviews, participants were invited to participate in an online focus group. The focus group served to test the initial analysis and explored themes through iterative group discussion (Krueger, 1994; Merriam & Tisdall, 2016). The focus group was held within three weeks of the completion of the individual interviews.

Setting. The study was conducted at the campus of ABC University, which is a faith-based private four-year liberal arts university located in the midwestern United States. Primarily, ABC University offers baccalaureate degrees, but the university does grant master's degrees in education, speech pathology, and accounting. The majority of the 3,500 students attending ABC University live on campus, with approximately 97% of the freshman and sophomores living in dormitory style residences. Historically, ABC University could be described as a tangible culture, with a "deeply rooted identity, a supportive and appreciative community, and a grounding in religious or spiritual rather than secular values . . . based on a parochial perspective . . . residency-based education, tutorial programs, and community-based learning projects" (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008, p. 187). Some of the learning objectives at ABC University include building healthy relationships, growing in faith, and learning self-management. This study explored how students experienced life away from the university residences as they take up their online classes away from campus and leave the residence community.

Relationship of the researcher to the setting/bias. I am currently employed at ABC University in the residence life department. Researching one's own institution may be seen as "backyard" research (Creswell, 2009, p. 177) even though there is merit to the researcher having a level of knowledge about the institution and its practices (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Coghlan, 2007). As a former student of ABC University and a current staff member, I have a history of "preunderstanding" (Coghlan, 2007, p. 296), which has some advantages yet poses some significant challenges.

As a current employee in the residence life department at ABC University and someone who has spent over twenty years working in residence life departments, I have a bias toward overvaluing the on-campus experience. I believe that students who live in on campus residences build stronger social networks and develop richer relationships with both students and staff. ABC has a long history of offering socio-educational programming, which is part of their commitment to developing the whole student. As a live-in staff member, I believe that my proximity to students allows for meaningful conversation and mentoring in both formal and informal ways. Part of the reason for my continued involvement in the residence life program at ABC University is based both on my own positive experiences as a student as well as my belief that proximity in relationships matters. I also may have a bias toward being loyal to the university and, therefore, to not hearing the fullness of the student's experience.

As a professional with a Master's in Social Work, I am aware that I listen for themes related to mental well-being. To mitigate my bias, I engaged in a reflective process as outlined by Coghlan (2007). There are three aspects to this reflective process: (a) reflecting on content, where issues themselves are thought about; (b) process, thinking about procedures and strategies; and (c) premise, which is taking time to reflect on underlying perspectives and/or assumptions. I

am also trained in solution-focused active listening skills. As such, I brought this professional training and experience in asking open-ended questions into the interview process. This approach starts from a posture of "not knowing" and is motivated by genuine curiosity about the student's experience (De Jong & Berg, 2013, p. 20).

Research Question

The following research question guided this project: What is the experience of residential students of a mid-west university who have moved away from residence as a result of COVID-19?

Protocols

During recruitment, potential participants were sent a consent waiver. The consent waiver indicated that participant's identifying information would remain confidential, unless a participant disclosed a desire to harm themselves or someone else. In order to assure confidentiality, data was collected and stored using a password protected computer. Collected data was presented using pseudonyms or in aggregate form with no personal identifiers. Participants were sent transcripts of the individual interviews to review for personal identifiers and to check the transcript for accuracy of collected information

At the beginning of every individual interview, participants were informed of the purpose of the study and how the information they shared will be utilized. All participants were apprized that the interview was going to be audio recorded and verbal consent was requested at the beginning of the interview. Participants were reminded that participation is voluntary, and they were welcome to end the interview at any time without any negative repercussions. I then alerted participants that a copy of the findings may be shared with ABC University. I thanked each participant and gave them an estimated duration of the interview.

Individual interview protocol. I began individual interviews with an opening question to create a comfortable, open atmosphere. I balanced creating rapport with the participant and demonstrating neutrality throughout the interviews (Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). After the interview, I thanked the participant, confirmed that I would follow up if clarification was needed, and then explained the next steps regarding the focus group.

Each participant was invited to participate in a focus group and completion of the focus group was required to receive the gift card. Prior to the focus group, participants were sent an email asking them to sign up for a time and also letting them know if they participated, they would be referred to by their first name as it was not possible to guarantee confidentiality. At the beginning of the focus group meeting, participants were given a chance to say hello to each other as some of them knew each other. After informal greetings occurred, I shared the focus group protocol which included reminding participants of the purpose of the study, encouraging them to share whatever their experience was even if it was contrary to the group, reminding them to keep all group members' identities confidential, and reminding them that the conversation would be audio-recorded by otter.ai (Appendix B).

The protocol was designed to avoid both questions that could be answered with a yes or no response and also questions that asked "why" (Krueger, 1994; Patton, 2015). Instead, protocol was designed to include questions related to experience and behavior, opinions and values, feelings, knowledge, sensory, and background questions (Merriam & Tisdall, 2016; Patton, 2015). The questions for the individual interview were designed to be open ended and allow the participant to speak about their personal experience. Within the action research model, the participant is seen as an expert of their own reality and the researcher's role is to capture the essence of their perception of their experience (Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As Rubin

and Rubin (2012) encourage, the researcher should maintain a posture of "a respect for and curiosity about people's experiences and perspectives, and the ability to ask about what is not yet understood" (2012, p. 6). The protocol questions were framed as main questions. However, as participants responded, I asked them to elaborate on particular themes that had been discussed in the individual interviews by using probing questions and follow up questions (Flipp, 2014b; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Focus group protocol. Based on Krueger's (1994) work, the focus group questions included beginning with introductory questions, moving to transition questions, key questions, and ending questions (1994, p. 54-55). The content of the questions was determined by the themes that emerged from the individual interviews, such as clarifying what was important, what they learned about themselves through the process, and how their academic learning impacts their perspective on what is currently happening (Appendix B).

Before the focus groups began, I took care to prepare myself by adopting a "not knowing" posture, choosing to take on the role of "enlightened novice" (Krueger, 1994, p. 105). When adopting this posture, the researcher assumes that the participants have more knowledge than the facilitator and the questions are asked in such a way as to elicit the experience of the participants. This posture was chosen because all of the participants are aware that I, as the researcher, have prior knowledge of ABC University and the residence life program. During the focus group, I asked questions that encouraged the participants to talk with each other and create dialogue, rather than each participant having a back and forth conversation with me. Along with the pre-set questions, I did ask some follow up and probing questions as appropriate.

Pilot Test

To ensure interview protocol clarity, I conducted an interview with two individuals who were not eligible for the study and were approximately the same age as the university students who would participate. Both pilot interviews were successful in the sense that they informed the flow of interview questions, as well as a sense as to how much time may be required for each question. Certain questions were reworded for clarity and a question of "can you tell me what state you live in and how those restrictions impact you" was added.

Participants

This study was designed to be a qualitative phenomenological based action research therefore the participants were chosen purposefully (Merriam & Tisdall, 2016; Orcher, 2005). The participants in this study were students in their second year at ABC who were living in residence and moved home following the school's email announcement on March 18.

Second year residential students were purposefully chosen because they have previous experience in residence life at ABC University; a baseline experience of a typical academic year in residence life. First year students were excluded from the study due to their lack of experience in the residence halls and because they experience different developmental issues than second year students. At ABC University, most juniors and seniors live off-campus by design and have less of a need for a structured living environment. Particular student groups in areas I supervise, such as residence hall 123 (a pseudonym) and 456 (a pseudonym), and student leaders, particularly in residence life, were excluded to account for concerns regarding power differential.

Participant inclusion criteria.

- Current second-year student at ABC University.
- Lived in residence (dormitory) this current academic year (up until March 2020).

- Lived in residence (dormitory) this past academic year (2019-2020).
- Not a student from 123 or 456 residence hall.
- Not a student who has been offered a student leader role for 2020-2021.

The Vice President of Student Life of ABC University (see Appendix C) gave permission to recruit residential students for the study. Following IRB approval, all eligible participants were invited to participate via email (Appendix D). 16 participants responded and completed their consent waiver. These 16 participants were schedule for an interview the following week.

Table 3

Table of Participant Information

	Name	Living with away from campus	Studying	Duration of Interview	Focus Group
1	Annie	Parents & 2 Tenants	Linguistic and Chinese	55:18m	Saturday
2	Brenna	Parents & younger siblings	Education	55:37m	Saturday
3	Jean	Parents & younger siblings	Nursing	45:21m	NA
4	Kylie	Parents	Human Resources	51:31m	NA
5	Eric	Parents, Grandparents, & younger siblings	Biology (Pre-med)	45.04m	Thursday
6	Frank	Parents & younger siblings	Pre-med	51:09m	Thursday
7	Grace	Parents, older siblings and nephew	Spanish and Psychology	40:57m	NA
8	Hannah	Older brother and grandparents	Political Science, Philosophy, and Economics	45:45m	Saturday
9	Isabelle	Parents & siblings	Social Work	40.29m	Saturday
10	Melanie	Parents & siblings	English	46:08m	Saturday
11	Kate	Parents & younger siblings	Nursing	44:30m	Thursday
12	Luke	Parents & younger siblings	Accounting	33:48m	Saturday
13	Matthew	Parents & younger siblings	Physics and Math	28:26m	Thursday
14	Maxwell	Parents & siblings	Computer Science	42:28m	Thursday
15	Thomas	Friend and friend's family	Chemistry and Mechanical Engineer	46:37m	Saturday
16	Laura	Parents and younger sibling	Engineering	54:32m	Thursday

Recruiting Participants

After receiving permission from the Vice President of Student Life at ABC University, I connected with the Dean of Students to procure a list of eligible participants. Once the Dean of Students sent me the list of eligible students, I checked the list to ensure that there were no students who were going to be student leaders for next year and that no student listed was going to live in one of the two buildings I oversee. However, students who were leaders this past year were eligible since their position had now concluded. Once the list was double checked, I sent an invitation to participate in the research project to 342 sophomore students (see Appendix D).

After a few days, students began to respond to me, expressing their interest in the project. Once students responded with affirmative interest, I sent them a follow up email (Appendix E) which included the consent form (Appendix F). Thirty students responded that they were interested and the first 16 who returned their signed consent form were contacted to arrange a 1:1 interview. In the email and consent form, the purpose, benefits, and the risks of the study were explained. Once students responded to my email with an attached signed consent form, I invited them to an interview time. Interviews were held all within a one-week time frame. Every participant who signed a consent form and agreed to an individual interview time completed their interview. Once the individual interview had been completed, participants were invited to attend a focus group, which was held within two to three weeks of the individual interviews. Participation in both interviews was necessary for students to receive their $25 Amazon gift card.

Participants were given a time to interview and were told the interview would occur digitally over a Microsoft Teams platform but received no instructions about where the interview needed to take place. All of the interviewees chose to be interviewed at their place of residence. In part, this choice was driven by the fact that many areas in the United States and Canada were

still closed and under a "stay at home" order. It was helpful to hear students talk about what their situation had been like where they lived since their current environment factored into much of what they discussed. As Patton (2015) outlined, "often the answer to why people do what they do is found not just within the individual but rather, within the system of which they are a part: social, family, organizational, community, religious, political, and economic systems" (p. 8). The limitation of having students interview from their homes will be discussed under the "limitations" section in Chapter 5.

Data Collection Procedures

Individual interviews. Given that all the eligible participants for this study moved away from campus and that in-person interviews were not possible due to COVID-19 quarantine guidelines, participants were interviewed digitally through Microsoft Teams. The semi-structured interviews were scheduled for 45-60 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded and the data were collected by an online transcription service called otter.ai. Along with the audio-recording, I took notes throughout the interview as I observed participants' non-verbal cues. Data were collected from 16 interviews at which point I determined that the saturation point was achieved (Merriam & Tisdall, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). After each interview concluded, I also wrote my impressions of the interview and the interviewee as well as a summary of the interview in my research journal.

Interviewees were given the choice to set an individual interview time at 10:00am, 12:30pm, 3:00pm, or 7:00pm EST (ABC University time). Only one participant chose the 7:00pm time slot and all interviews occurred the same week in May. The interviews took place over a digital platform and as a result, there were some experiences of time lag and a difficulty with feedback in some cases. It was also difficult to discern some facial expressions and non-

verbal cues as the lighting in some of the students' location was particularly dark. The length of the interviews ranged from the longest interview time of 55 minutes and 37 seconds to the shortest interview of 28 minutes and 26 seconds. The average time for the 1:1 interviews was 45 minutes and 29 seconds. Every participant who signed up for a time showed up for their interview.

The interviews all took place during a one-week time frame to try to meet students at the same point in their semester. However, the week students were interviewed was exam week, which meant some students were in the middle of exams while they were being interviewed and others had finished the semester. For example, most of the participants who interviewed on Monday still had a few exams to complete and talked about being excited about being close to done but they were not done yet. As the week of interviewing progressed, students began to express their excitement about finishing the semester and completing their exams. Some participants demonstrated visible and verbal signs of relief. They also discussed how they felt less pressure now that their semester was finished.

Focus group. The focus groups were conducted approximately two weeks after the individual interviews had occurred. The time chosen was purposeful so focus groups were held close enough to the individual interviews that participants could remember themes but the two-week time gap also allowed for participants to have some time to reflect on their responses during the individual interviews. Thirteen of the 16 participants attended the focus groups (see Table 3). Six students participated on June 4th with a running time of 1 hour and 12 minutes and seven students participated on June 6th, with a running time of 1 hour and 18 minutes. This size of group was perfect as a group of 6-10 participants is recommended (Merriam & Tisdall, 2016).

The focus group met using the Microsoft Teams platform. The focus group interview was audio-recorded and the data was collected by an online transcription service called otter.ai. Along with the audio-recording, I took notes throughout the interview as I observed participants non-verbal cues and the ways participants responded to each other. Data were collected until the saturation point was achieved (Merriam & Tisdall, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012) and both focus groups had a duration of 1 hour and 12 minutes and 1 hour and 18 minutes. As part of my reflexivity process, I wrote about my impressions of the focus group and the dynamics of the group as well as a summary of the focus group in my research journal.

Data Analysis

I recorded my first impressions in a research journal along with ongoing observation notes. The transcriptions were reviewed and analyzed using thematic analysis (Bogden & Biklen, 2003; NNGroup, 2019; Patton, 2015) and Colaizzi's 7 step method of data analysis (Colaizzi, 1978). Thematic analysis includes the process of data analysis called horizontalization, which consider every aspect of data important until themes are revealed (Merriam & Tisdall, 2016; NN Group, 2019).

Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's 7 step data analysis (Colaizzi, 1978) along with Patton's guide to analyzing data. Both methods were used as Patton (2015) describes smaller steps that assist with coding the data. Patton (2015) suggested that researchers do the following when coding data: read through all of the transcripts several times and write notes in the margin, note possible topics, create codes (including assigning color for each topic, if helpful), and begin to look for regularly occurring themes. After this process has begun, Patton suggests that researchers extend, bridge, and surface the patterns and themes. Extending is explained by looking for more depth within the theme. Bridging is described by looking for connections

between the patterns or themes. Surfacing refers to looking for themes that have not been added yet but would fit the data (Patton, 2015). Finally, researchers should look for divergent data, which is an analysis of data that does not seem to fit any pattern and is important for precisely that reason (Patton, 2015). For this particular study, Patton's suggestions augmented step 1-4 of Colaizzi's method. Patton also suggests looking for participant comments that might reflect a change in behavior, skill, knowledge, attitudes, values, or attitudes (2015), which I found helpful as part of this project because many student's comments were centered around changes they had experienced.

Colaizzi's 7 step method (Colaizzi, 1978) offers a broader step by step method of data analysis. Listed below is a description of his suggested steps along with explanations as to how data analysis was conducted for this project.

Step 1: Familiarization with data. After the interview was complete, I took time to copy each transcription of the individual interviews to a Word document. I then listened to each interview again, editing the transcription to ensure that it accurately reflected what was said during the interview. After editing each transcription, I reviewed each interview and created a summary of my impressions and general observations.

Step 2: Identifying significant statements. I read through the transcriptions a third time, this time paying attention to particular statements that seemed to be significant based on emerging themes. Each significant statement was highlighted in yellow if it was a general statement or highlighted in purple if it was a significant statement about feelings.

Step 3: Formulating meanings. The third step in the process involved looking for significant themes. For this step, I took each question heading and reviewed each transcript for participant's comments and insights regarding that particular subject. I created a very large

document which included most of the raw data from the transcripts of the individual interviews as well as the focus groups. In order to consider each piece of data equal, I used the process of horizontalization, which considers each piece of information important until themes arise (Merriam & Tisdall, 2016).

Step 4: Clustering themes. Using the large document, I began to look for themes within the particular question itself as well as themes that cross-cut multiple questions. I considered each theme equal and tried to bracket my own assumptions about what I might find. Related data was added to each theme, which resulted in certain themes becoming more prominent. Colors were assigned to each theme and a chart was created that indicated which color was used for which theme. Each response was coded for the particular theme it connected with. Some comments connected with more than one theme. When that was the case, one color (or more) was used for one half of the sentence and different colors were used for the rest of the sentence). The color-coded thematic chart is listed in Table 4. Using this method, it became visually evident which themes were specific to a particular question and which themes were seen across multiple questions. Comments related to cross cutting themes were compiled at the end of the large Word document.

Table 4

Legend for Color Coding

Emotional	Relational	Existential Thoughts
Feelings (Green 1)	Family (Blue Gray)	Self-Reflection (Green 2)
Mental Health (Lavender)	Friendships (Blue 2)	Perspective (Blue 3)
Roller Coaster (Purple)	Loss (Orange)	Moving Forward/Future (Dark Red 1)
Independence (Yellow 2)	Isolation (Light Peach)	Others are worse off (Cream)
Feels like Vacation (Pink)	Community (Peach)	Faith/Control (Yellow 1)
		Time (Gray 3)

Academics	Physical	Tools
Academics (Green 3)	Job/Internship (Green 4)	Reading/Hobbies (Blue 1)
Motivation (Brown 1)	Exercise /Physical (Gray 1)	Technology (Orchid)
	Weather (Gray 4)	Structure (Cayenne)
	Food (Brown 2)	Time Commitment (Grey 2)

Step 5: Developing an exhaustive description. As topics began to emerge, I began to create descriptions for each topic which organized themes that provided clarification as to which comments could be included with which theme. The first thing I noticed was that loss was a significant theme for almost every participant. I used a working definition of loss that encompassed a wide range aspects of loss, including loss of freedom, of goals and dreams, of relationships, and of control. The grief research of Kubler-Ross and Kessler is important at this point because a number of students discussed various stages of grief, such as denial, anger, depression, and acceptance (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2014).

After this process, it became clear about halfway through the description process that many of the themes aligned with Chickering's (1969) student development theory. Themes significantly aligned with five of the seven vectors, including managing emotions, developing interpersonal relationships, developing competency, developing identity, developing autonomy. The other two themes, developing purpose and developing integrity, were somewhat connected

but not as strongly. For these seven themes, the pre-existing description of those vectors was utilized.

Finally, the themes of gratitude and resilience were identified and guided by the research of Bland et al. (2012). At times, decisions needed to be made about possible overlap. For example, many students mentioned that they felt a loss of independence and freedom moving back into their parent's home. Participant comments could be themed as loss and they could also be themed as developing autonomy. In the end, I chose to briefly list the loss of freedom under the loss theme and expanded further in the section regarding autonomy.

Step 6: Producing a fundamental structure. The definition of each theme was given a short two- or three-word description. This step in the process did not produce many results, but it was helpful to have a shorthand with which to be able to categorize data.

Step 7: Seeking verification of the fundamental structure. This step was completed in two formats. During the focus group, participants were asked to comment on themes that emerged from the individual interviews. They were also encouraged to add their comments if they felt their experience differed from the other participants.

Additionally, transcripts of the individual conversations were sent to each participant via email several weeks after the interview to verify accuracy. Participants offered feedback if they felt the transcript did not accurately describe what they wanted to convey. I did not send my coded transcripts or analysis to participants.

Trustworthiness

An important element of all qualitative research is trustworthiness (Creswell, 2009; Merriam & Tisdall, 2016; Orcher, 2005; Patton, 2009; Patton, 2015). Creswell (2009) described eight methods to ensure validity of the data: triangulation, member checking, using rich,

descriptive data, clarifying research bias, presenting negative or discrepant data, spending a lot of time in the field, using peer reviewing, and using an external auditor to review the entire project. For this project, the following methods were used to ensure trustworthiness: member checking, using rich, descriptive data, clarifying researcher bias, presenting discrepant data, and using an external auditor to review the project.

Member checking. For data collection purposes, I used a website called otter.ai to record and transcribe the individual interviews and the focus groups. Otter.ai provides a recording and a rough transcript which then needed to be edited for spelling and grammar. The transcription was then taken from the website and formatted into a Word document. The Word document was then reviewed by the researcher to correct typos or errors in recording. I also used the audio-recording to identify and then clarify any areas of the transcript that required further clarity. After I reviewed and clarified the transcriptions, I sent the individual transcription to the respective participant so they could review the transcription for any interpretive errors. Thirteen of the sixteen participants reviewed their transcription. Three participants suggested small changes such as removing identifying information as to which state they were from. The other 10 participants agreed that the transcripts accurately captured the essence of their interview and gave their approval.

External auditing. Several of the coded transcripts along with research notes and interview summaries were sent by email to an external auditor who reviewed the data. The external auditor verified the existence of the data as well as approved the summary and coding process.

Reflexivity and bracketing. Reflexivity is the ability to reflect on yourself as a researcher including thinking about your education, your experiences, your socioeconomic level,

your race, your age, your values and beliefs and how those factors may influence how you hear and interpret data (Creswell, 2009; Flipp, 2014d; Merriam & Tisdall, 2016). In order to mitigate researcher bias, I engaged in three processes: reflexive engagement with someone who know me well, bracketing my own beliefs by journaling my own biases during the interview process, and finally, listing my potential biases and assumptions as part of this research project (Flipp, 2014d).

In addition to understanding my own bias based on my personal demographics, experiences, and values, I also drew from my training in social work which emphasized a not knowing approach in which the client is viewed as the expert (De Jong & Berg, 2013). The posture of seeing the participant as the expert of their own experience allowed me to listen in a way that was less expectant of my own answers and more dependent on their answers. In addition, questions were designed to be open ended and allow participants to define answers as they say fit. Finally, a question was included which stated directly "how do you make meaning of everything that has happened over the past two months since you moved away from campus," (Appendix A) which allowed participants to state how they have made meaning of this experience in their own words.

Clarifying researcher bias. As a researcher who conducted research at my own institution, understanding researcher bias is critical. As a person who has worked in some element of student life for the past 20 years, I have particular biases about what should be important to students and what I hope they learn. As someone who has been trained in the social work field and someone who has had increasingly regular conversations with students about mental health over the past two decades, I have a bias that many students are mentally fragile. As someone who is a not a digital native, I am also biased to prefer face to face conversations as

opposed to conversations using technology. I also believe that reappraisal is better for mental well-being than the suppression of emotions.

As a person of faith who works at an institution where faith is considered a central tenant to our learning, I am biased toward thinking that students whose faith life is active and strong would be faring better with their mental health. Admittedly, my lens of how I hear students' stories is impacted by my own upbringing and experiences of being a Canadian citizen who has kids of her own who are the same age as the interviewees. To the best of my ability, I leaned into my social work training where I was taught to approach each interview with a "not knowing" posture and follow the participant's lead. This was mostly possible but also difficult in the sense that the interview was semi-structured and there were a number of set questions I asked every participant.

Another aspect of my experience and background that could potentially impact my ability to understand the experiences of sophomore students is the fact that because I am middle-aged, I am not a digital native. Typically, I am also someone who is hesitant about new technology and am somewhat of a Luddite. My reticence to adapt to new technology may impact the ways I interpret student comments about their usage and relationship with technology.

Process of giving pseudonyms. When I originally transcribed the interviews, I assigned each of the participants a number, based on the order in which they had interviewed. While writing out Chapters 4 and 5, it occurred to me that I needed to assign each person a pseudonym. However, even assigning a pseudonym is laden with researcher bias. Within some communities, some names are connected with particular cultures or races. Do I assign the pseudonym based on their race? Do I do the opposite? How will name assignation impact how readers interpret student experiences? As a White person, I wanted to be very aware of how my

racial background may impact how information is conveyed. To mitigate researcher bias in this area, I asked each of the participants if they would like to choose a pseudonym and used the name they chose. I also realize my re-naming of the institution may have implications, so I chose a name that is basic to the English alphabet: ABC University.

Using rich, thick description. The interviews occurred online, therefore; I was unable to observe a lot of the non-verbals of the interviewees. I believe that observing the interviewees in-person would have allowed me to understand even more of their experience. When using the digital platform, sometimes a participant's expressions were hidden, and voice tone changed due to video lag. It would have been ideal to be able to conduct the interviews in the participants' places of residence, which would give me an understanding of their physical location during their time away from campus. The ability to observe more of the participant's surroundings could be considered field research, which may have provided a more relaxed, informal setting in which the participant may have shared more information (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). In addition, I would be able to experience their current physical surroundings and access to resources which may have contributed to a greater understanding of participant's reflections on their mental, social, and academic well-being. However, I did try to observe the participants non-verbal expressions and gestures as much as possible to provide for additional details when describing their thoughts and ideas.

Presenting discrepant data. I tried to include discrepant data in the findings as students had very different experiences than each other. Before the two focus groups began, I stated that differing opinions were welcome and participants could feel free to state their experience, even if it was different than another participant's experience.

Limitations of Methodology and Assumptions

I am currently employed in residence life at ABC University so this particular research may be considered "backyard" research (Creswell, 2009). Research in one's own institution is discouraged due to the potential issue that the data may be "biased, incomplete, or compromised" (Creswell, 2009, p. 177). However, I worked through a process of becoming aware of any biases I may have because I am a current employee of ABC University (see Relationship of the Researcher to the Setting/Bias). They were also aware of power dynamics that may exist with students who are hired in a student leadership role in residence life in the future so not being a student leader in 2020-2021 was included in the eligibility criteria. Students who had served as a leader in residence life during this academic year in which the study was conducted (2019-2020) were eligible because there was no power differential now that the position had concluded.

The methodology is also limited somewhat in that the meetings occurred over a digital platform rather than in person. Not being able to observe the student face to face limited some of the researcher's ability to document observations regarding body language, eye contact, etc. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, Merriam & Tisdall, 2016; Patton, 2015). Although building rapport can be slightly more difficult than in-person interviews, online interviews can be a source of good data collection (Merriam & Tisdall, 2016).

I attended ABC University in the early 1990's so I have assumptions as to how students are doing based on my own memories and experiences as a former student. I also identify as a White, middle-upper class, middle-aged female. My race and socio-economic position influence how I interpret the data that is shared with me. My educational background is in social work. I have a degree a Masters of Social Work and have spent the better part of the past twenty years connecting with university students who are dealing with mental health issues. It is very possible

that my past interactions with students who have struggled may influence my perception as to how students are actually doing. Much of the focus of my professional career has been an infusion of social work and education. I am deeply interested in the mental well-being of students as they pursue their academic endeavors. The focus of mental health related literature in chapter 2 is a manifestation of my bias, accentuated by residential life experiences with college students. Finally, I am a person of faith and I have been raised in a particular faith community. My expression of faith aligns with the faith commitments and traditions of ABC University. As such I may have certain assumptions about shared values or experiences that may not necessarily be true for the participants.

I assume that participants were honest with me during their interviews and openly shared their experiences with me. I also assume that participants were hesitant to share their full truth with me because I work for ABC University and that participants may have shared what they think I wanted to hear. At the beginning of every interview, I assured participants that the focus of the interview was their experience and how moving away from campus had impacted them.

Delimitations

The study only included students participating from one mid-sized university located in Midwest. In addition, the study focused on only sophomore students who were living in residence and lived in on-campus residence during the 2018-2019 school year as well. Demographic questions such as racial, ethnic, and gender identification were excluded. To accommodate for potential power differential, students who lived in either of the two buildings I oversaw during the study year or students who will be taking on residence life leadership roles in the coming year were not eligible for the study.

Ethical Considerations

The study underwent an Institutional Review process by both Bethel University, the institution where I am a graduate student, and ABC University. Along with IRB approval, the researcher ensured that all aspects of the Belmont report were attended to as this study involved human subjects. In this regard, researchers need to be aware of three main areas: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Flip, 2014a).

Respect for persons. The area of respect for persons includes ensuring that participants are treated with respect, that they are well-informed about the nature and the risks of the study, that participants understand the nature of the study, that the participants understand they can withdraw consent at any time, that they are willing to participate (Citi, n.d.; Flipp, 2014a; Roberts, 2010) and communicating how their privacy and confidentiality would be addressed throughout the study (Creswell, 2009; Merriam & Tisdall, 2016). The ideas of coercion and power required careful attention, particularly during the recruitment phase of the research process (Citi, n.d.).

Informed consent. When the study began, I ensured that the participants' willingness to participate was established by having them sign an informed consent form which outlined the risks and the benefits of participating in the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Citi, n.d.; Flipp, 2014a; Patten, 2007; Roberts, 2010). For this study, the ability to withdraw without consequence was outlined in the consent form (Appendix F) as well as spoken verbally before the interviews began.

Recruitment process. I am currently employed in residence life at ABC University, so I did not interview students from the residences I supervised due to a possible power dynamic. The participants are sophomores so many of them will not return to on campus housing. I am not in a

position to have final authority over any housing decision for next year. In the first email contact, I also disclosed from the outset that they are employed in residence life at ABC University.

Privacy and confidentiality. Due to the fact that risk to privacy and confidentiality is increased when interviews are audio-recorded, I let the participants know at three separate points that the interview was going to be audio-recorded and transcribed: on the waiver form prior to the interview session, right before the interview started, and then again just as the interview started and the recording had begun.

Individual Interviews. Participants who were interested in participating the study were sent a consent form (Appendix F) that they needed to sign and scan back to me.

Participants were audio-recorded and the interviews were transcribed by the Otter.ai application, which was installed on my personal computer, which is password protected. Just prior to the interview, I informed the participants that the interview was being audio recorded. Once the interview began, the participants were again asked for verbal consent to be recorded. Regarding Otter's privacy policy, their webpage indicates that they:

> are committed to keeping your data private and secure. We do not sell or share your data with anybody (except as necessary to respond to lawful requests, etc.). We may select segments of raw or partially processed audio and associated transcribed text from multiple recorded conversations from different users to be used as training data to automatically train our proprietary artificial intelligence (AI) technology. Only after receiving explicit permission from our users, we may manually transcribe certain recorded conversations to further enrich our training data. We sync your data over an encrypted connection, and store it in our secure data center that has both physical and electronic security. (Otter, 2020)

I am the only person to see the interviews and hear the audio recordings.

*Focus Groups***.** By signing the consent form (Appendix F), participants agreed that they will not discuss the study or disclose who else participated in the focus group discussion.

Beneficence. Beneficence refers to the idea that participants should also benefit from the research study and experience the lowest risk possible (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Citi, n.d.; Creswell, 2009, Flipp, 2014a). Researchers also need to be mindful of the idea that, in particular situations, a power differential can exist and that power can be misused (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2009). For this particular study, I outlined benefits the participants may gain such as the opportunity to share and explore their experience, which may assist with their own reappraisal process. I also outlined how their participation in this study benefits me in my research process as well as how it may benefit the higher educational community.

With respect to beneficence and risk, another ethical consideration was caring for the individual participants. The topic in question could possibly raise an emotional response, therefore, a number of protective factors were employed. Participants who answered questions during the interview could have become overwhelmed with emotions, such as loneliness, sadness, or anxiety. In the event a participant were to become distraught, I was prepared to offer both academic and mental health resources that are available for every ABC University student. In addition, before the interview began, participants were made aware that in the event that they disclose information regarding intent to harm self or harm others, that particular information is exempt from confidentiality and would be shared with appropriate personnel.

Justice. A third issue connected to ethical research is related to justice (Flipp, 2014a). Issues of justice impact how research is conducted as well as data presentation. Research participants need to be selected fairly, not on the basis of being a marginalized group, such as

people who are incarcerated or institutionalized (Citi, n.d.; Flipp, 2014a). Justice issues impact both presentation and distribution of data as well (Creswell, 2009; Flipp, 2014a). For this study, a purposeful sample of university students was selected as they have first-hand knowledge of what it was like for them to move away from campus due to COVID-19. The offer to participate in this study was extended to all eligible sophomores at ABC University without exclusion.

In conclusion, all efforts were made to adhere to ethical considerations, such beneficence, justice, and respect for persons throughout the entire process, including the sharing of the data post interviews. As part of the informed consent process, participants who demonstrated a level of distress or strong emotions during the interview process were made aware of the free counseling services provided by ABC University and given the counseling office's contact information if they did not have that information already.

Chapter 4: Interviews and Themes

"The thing that was like really special about college is like, every day is kind of its own story"

(Frank, personal communication, May 2020).

Chapter 4 begins with the biographies from the 16 participants. Then this chapter relays students' initial reactions to the news that they were being required to move off-campus. The chapter progresses into exploring themes from the interviews. Participant comments often reflected one of four themes: comments about an area of development, loss, gratitude, or resiliency. Comments about development mirrored Chickering's (1969) student development themes of managing emotions, developing interpersonal relationships, developing autonomy, developing, competencies, developing identity, and developing purpose. New themes that emerged from participant reflections were themes of loss, gratitude, and resiliency. Chapter 4 concludes by connecting this research to additional relevant literature.

Interview Participants - Biographies

Interestingly, of the 16 students who participated the study, over three quarters of them were the oldest or only in their family. Just under half of the participants had served in a leadership role in residence life this past year (compared to approximately 20% of all students who live in residence halls serving in some form of residence life leadership) and half of the students had already or planned to move back to Citytown (a pseudonym) to live in a house with their friends for the summer. Below are some short introductions to the 16 participants.

Annie. Annie is the youngest in her family and has four older brothers. Only one brother currently lives at home as he attends a local university. Annie lives with her mom and her dad in their family home. The family also has two other housemates who rent from them. Annie mentioned that there are occasionally minor conflicts between the people who live in her house

which can impact her ability to study. Annie has a strong love of Asian languages and is majoring in linguistics and Chinese. Annie is also very interested in social justice issues and decided to attend ABC University because members of her family had looked into attending there and she felt led to attend there. Annie shared that living in the living-learning community at ABC has really impacted her in a positive way.

Brenna. Brenna is the oldest in her family. She recalls that the idea of moving home was hard to think about because as much as she enjoys being with her family, she was a little nervous about how to do university studies while being home with siblings, the youngest of whom is under five years old. Brenna is an education major and was involved in an internship when the decision to move to online classes was made. Brenna has tried to have a positive attitude regarding the situation and is planning on completing a different internship at home this summer.

Eric. When Eric and I met, he was speaking with me from his parents' home in Canada. Even though the border between the US and Canada was closed at the time, he was able to get home because he was a Canadian citizen. Eric is living with his parents, his grandparents, and younger siblings at his family's home. Eric is a biology major and views his time away from campus as a time where he was able to discover a little bit more about himself as he was less busy. Eric reflected that he has really enjoyed spending time with his younger brother, finding a routine for exercise, rediscovering his enjoyment of reading, and he has realized how much he enjoys quiet, down time. Eric plans to move back to Citytown and live in a house with his friends this summer.

Frank. Frank's family lives on the West Coast. Frank did not want to go home at first as he really enjoys the community at ABC University. Frank did fly back home and move in with his family after the second email requiring students to move off campus was received. Frank is

on the pre-med track and speaks very highly of his time at ABC and of the friends he has made there. Frank describes himself as a "silver lining kind of guy." Frank also held a campus leadership role that ended when students were required to move off-campus. Frank hopes to move back to Citytown in the summer into a house with some friends as he has an internship lined up there.

Grace. Grace has been living at her parents' home during the time away from campus with her mom, her dad, siblings, and young nephew. Grace reported that it can be somewhat active and busy in the house and trying to maintain independence while fitting within the schedule of family life. Grace decided to attend ABC University because she liked the community aspect, the program format, and because she received a scholarship. Grace is studying psychology and Spanish. She served in a leadership position in her residence and had been very involved on campus until COVID-19.

Hannah. Hannah is studying political science, philosophy, and economics. During her time away from campus, Hannah is living with her older brother and her grandparents at her grandparent's home, located about an hour away from campus. Hannah did not want to leave campus at first and had to figure out where to go as the borders to the country where her parents are currently serving as missionaries are closed. Hannah said she has not minded being where she is because it is like her U.S. home away from home as this is where her family stays when her parents are in the U.S. Hannah talked about how it is a little isolating as her brother works and she and her brother have been trying not to expose their grandparents to COVID-19. Hannah was very active at ABC University while on campus and she served in a number of leadership positions. Hannah is planning on staying at her grandparent's house for the summer.

Isabelle. Isabelle's family lives about two hours away from campus in the same state as ABC University. Isabelle had had a good experience living at home and she views her time at home with her family as a blessing. Isabelle is living with her mom, her dad, and her two siblings at her family's home. Isabelle is a social work major. Isabelle decided to attend ABC University because she liked the fact that it was a smaller, faith-based school and she liked the surrounding area. Isabelle plans to move to an off-campus house in Citytown with some friends this summer.

Jean. Jean is the oldest of four siblings. She lives in the same state as ABC University, about 30 minutes away from campus. Jean felt like it was fine to move back home at first because she did not think she would be home as long as she was. Although she enjoys being home and spending time with her family, she misses her friends and has felt as though going home has prevented her progress toward independence somewhat. Jean has felt as though a lot of days blurred into the next and being home became very boring. Jean is majoring in nursing and almost decided not to attend ABC University because her mom had attended ABC. Jean changed her mind and decided to attend after she visited campus.

Kate. Kate is the oldest in her family and has three siblings. Kate has spent the whole time away from campus with her family. Moving away from campus was not her first choice, although Kate stated that she has been grateful for the time at home that she did not anticipate she would have. Kate is a nursing major and she held a leadership position in the residence this past year. Kate chose ABC University because of its nursing program format and because of the community feel she experienced when she visited. Kate plans to move back to Citytown this summer and live in a house with her friends.

Kylie. During the time away from campus, Kylie moved home with her family which includes her mom and her dad. Kylie would have preferred to stay on campus as she was afraid

her academic motivation would be harder away from school and the internet connection would be poor at home. Kylie recounts her time at home as being somewhat isolating and boring. Kylie began her time at ABC University studying actuary science and then switched to a human resource major. One of the aspects of ABC University that Kylie misses the most is the faith community, including missing the campus pastor. Overall, Kylie considers herself very fortunate as both of her parents still have their jobs and she was able to start working this summer as well. Kylie is planning on going to Citytown to visit her friends this summer.

Laura. Laura is an engineering major. During the time away from campus, she lived with her family at her parent's home with her younger brother, mother, and father. She is an avid athlete who takes exercise and physical health very seriously. She enjoys the outdoors and has been excited to spend more time outdoors as of late. Moving home was somewhat difficult for Laura as she tried to navigate what it meant to be an adult child living under her parents' roof again. Laura decided to attend ABC University due to the appeal of the coach and athletic program. Laura has an internship lined up for the summer and plans to move into a house with friends in Citytown.

Luke. Luke is the oldest in his family and has two younger siblings. Luke currently lives with his mom, his dad, and his two younger siblings in their family home and has been since students were required to leave campus. Luke was originally hesitant to move home because he did not want to leave his friends and because a family member is immunocompromised. Luke is an accounting major and decided to attend ABC University because his family has a long history and connection with ABC. Luke enjoyed his time at ABC and has developed close relationships with his friends. Even though Luke described his time at home as being good, Luke had strong feelings about leaving campus because he much preferred to stay.

Matthew. Matthew is a the oldest of four children. During the time away from campus, he lived with his mom, dad, and three siblings at their home on the West Coast. Matthew is a math and physics major. Matthew lives far away from ABC University so getting all his belongings sorted out before he left added to an already stressful situation. Matthew describes his personality as not easily rattled. Moving online worked out okay for Matthew, but it was not his preference. When asked why he chose ABC University, he replied that his parents had made the choice for him. When asked how he felt about that, he replied that it has been okay. He also reported living in the residence halls has been a good experience for him. Matthew mostly viewed the experience of moving away from campus as an inconvenience and has chosen to see the experience as a temporary issue that you accept, try to make the best of, and move on.

Maxwell. During the time away from campus, Maxwell lived with his parents and two siblings at the family home. Even though he really likes it at home and home is only 15 minutes from campus, Maxwell was hoping to stay on campus as long as possible. Maxwell is a computer science major who loves role playing games. Right before he went home, he set up a server on Discord that allowed him and his family and friends to stay connected during the time away from campus. Maxwell reported that he has really enjoyed his experience at ABC University and has had a good experience with classes and in the residence halls.

Melanie. Melanie spent most of her early years outside of the U.S. and spent a lot of time being homeschooled. Melanie is majoring in English and has a strong interest in linguistics. For Melanie, moving away from campus was difficult because she had just begun to feel like campus was becoming her space and signified independence for her. Since moving home, she has spent time working through what it means to be an adult child who is living again under a parent's roof and adjusting to the family's schedule. Melanie hoped to stay on campus but ended up moving

back home after the second email which required students to move away from campus unless they were international students. She plans on staying at her parents' home for the duration of the summer. Melanie chose ABC university because she thought it would be a better fit for her personally. She experienced living in two different residence halls and enjoyed serving as a student leader this year.

Thomas. Thomas is a chemistry and mechanical engineering major. Due to poor internet connection at home and his financial situation, Thomas decided not to move back to his family's home. Thomas stayed in the city in which ABC University is located and stayed with his friend Tim and Tim's family. Thomas spoke highly of the experience and expressed a lot of gratitude for that accommodation. Thomas has an older sister who also stayed in Citytown as well. Thomas decided to attend ABC University after creating an extensive algorithm and visiting his top three schools. Thomas spoke of a strong affection for his time in residence and his floormates. During the summer, Thomas had a research internship opportunity and planned to move into an off-campus house in Citytown with Tim and a few other friends.

Interview Themes

When the interviews began, I asked participants if they would be willing to share their initial reactions to the emails they received that informed them their classes were moving online. Participants were very willing to share and often shared strong reactions with me. Once we had discussed their initial reaction, themes arose from the participant's comments, including developmental growth, loss, gratitude, and resiliency. As the themes and comments below demonstrate, students continued to learn about their subject areas, their selves, and the world around them even as they stepped away from campus.

Initial Reaction: "It didn't really hit me at first". As interviews began, participants shared a range of emotions regarding their initial reaction to the idea of moving away from campus. On Wednesday, March 11, 2020, students at ABC University received an email from the President of the University letting them know that by the following week, all classes would be moved online until April 13th which would be after Easter Break. In the same email, students were encouraged to move home until after Easter Break. When asked about their initial reaction to the email, several students recalled sitting with their friends and crying together. Others called their parents to try to make arrangements regarding housing or getting home. A number of participants recalled feeling sad, stressed, and confused. Annie indicated that she was feeling a lot of stress and confusion about what to do as soon as she received the initial email:

> I was just feeling kind of stressed out you know because all of a sudden you have this big decision to make of like are you going to stay on campus? Are you going to go home? If I go home, I won't see any of my friends for a long time. But if I stay, is that safe? You know those kind of questions so yeah, I think it was very stressful and also very sad because I really like ABC. (Annie, personal communication, May 2020)

Grace recalled coming back from her on-campus work job that day to a very animated scene:

> So it's kind of like hysteria all around, and everybody was gathered in like the lobbies with the dorms and stuff like waiting for the news together to come out. And then, when the news first came out, I was like, kind of nervous umm, and like bummed. (Grace, personal communication, May 2020)

Grace also recalled that the initial email caused personal stress for her as well: "I remember that week being like so chaotic I was like so stressed, um, just because I was trying to figure out like

was I gonna be able to like go home" (Grace, personal communication, May 2020). Melanie recalled the day she received her email very clearly:

> So, the day I got the email was one of the most stressful days of the semester, because I just the uncertainty I think and not knowing what would happen exactly with classes and with the rest of the semester, and just having that kind of hanging over my head was really a lot. (Melanie, personal communication, May 2020)

Other students were not as initially disturbed by the email because they thought moving away from campus would be a short-lived experience. Jean remembers thinking the move away from campus would be a temporary situation, so the initial email was not as troublesome for her:

> I remember sitting on the floor with like two or three of my friends on the floor and we were just like, I don't like I don't really know what's going on but it'll be okay. Like I'm generally a pretty optimistic person. So I was very prepared to come back. (Jean, personal communication, May 2020)

Eric also did not realize the extent of the changes at first:

> I think it didn't really hit me at first, like, just how long that that time would be really over it's going home for the rest of the year. But like the two months is felt like a really long time when you're not actually at school. (Eric, personal communication, May 2020)

Even students who lived close to campus decided to try to stay on campus as long as possible. Maxwell, whose family lived close by, wanted to stay on campus for as long as possible:

> I was kind of half expecting it, but it was still, it was still a shock. And I thought, well, my home was only 15 minutes away, so I could go home but I really like it here. I still, I still tried and all my friends are there so I tried to stay as long as possible. (Maxwell, personal communication, May 2020)

Like Maxwell, Laura did not want to move home at first.

> I actually didn't really feel like I needed to move home from that first initial email. Like I was like, okay, like I have an uncle that lives in [Citytown]. I can do online classes. Heck, I can do online classes on campus. It's gonna be fine. (Laura, personal communication, May 2020)

Reaction to follow up email: "You're homeless . . . go find somewhere to live."

However, an additional email was sent out to students on March 18 saying that unless students were unable to go home due to their country's borders being closed or financial hardship, they were required to move off campus within three days, which was later amended to five days. This news came as a shock and a disappointment to many students. Luke recalls: "That whole week, like, it just kept getting crazier and crazier" (personal communication, May 2020). Some students were in disbelief. Laura shared that:

> I think the hardest email to get was actually the one where it said we are going to be online for the rest of semester. That one . . . that one I broke down on like, the moment that I read it. It was like this like I cannot believe this is happening and there are times during that week where I would go to bed and like oh no like I got bit by a spider and is not happening. (Laura, personal communication, May 2020)

For Laura and for other students, the news that they needed to leave campus left many of them feeling disbelief and stress.

Students' feelings moved from stress and sadness to feelings of fear, loss of control, frustration, and hurt as they experienced being evicted from campus and being required to leave a community they love. Participants used phrases such as "getting kicked off campus," having friends "forcefully taken from you," "you gotta leave in two days," and "suddenly being ripped

out of that environment is jarring". Thomas shared that he felt like he had been evicted from campus:

> The biggest moment of uncertainty for me, came in the email where they said that everyone had to go home and you had three days to move out like that was particularly stressful for me, because I felt like, ABC had just said oh yeah [sic] by the way you're homeless, like, go find somewhere to live. (Thomas, personal communication, May 2020)

Laura shared that as the situation progressed, they felt unwanted on campus.

> And as that week kind of progressed it was like . . . no, they don't want me here. I don't want to be here. I get it now . . . . And once I decided, you know what, I'm just going to go home for the rest of the semester, it hurt, but I felt better felt like this is where I need to be. (Laura, personal communication, May 2020)

As the realization of the severity sunk in, a number of students experienced a simultaneously feeling of understanding combined with a feeling of hurt.

For students who lived out of state, this decision to move away from campus included additional difficulties, such as quickly deciding what to do with belongings. For Frank, who lives on the West Coast, this compounded his stress.

> So then they also gave you two days to move out which was rather annoying because I come from [the West Coast], so I have to figure out how to pack up my suitcase and luggage into bags and get them into the trunk room or figure out how to get home in one bag, because I [sic] not exactly financially well off enough to get all of my bags home. (Frank, personal communication, May 2020)

Matthew, who also lives on the West Coast, shared the same feeling as he found trying to find a place for his belongings was another thing to worry about on top of trying to arrange flights etc.

> And it was kind of a bummer and it was really inconvenient to just getting home finding a place for all my stuff now to hang out for you know what, three months or so before I can get back to [Citytown] so that, that was, it was really just a hassle more than anything. (Matthew, personal communication, May 2020)

Developmental growth. Although the questions were open ended and general in nature, most of the participants' responses could be themed using Chickering's seven vectors of student development (1969). Comments by students were grouped by themes of managing emotions, developing competency, developing interpersonal relationships, struggles with moving from independence to autonomy, finding purpose, identity development, and developing integrity.

Managing emotions: "Honestly, name an emotion and I have probably felt it over the last few weeks". Managing emotions be viewed as a process of recognizing and regulating affect and the stimulation that occurs as a result of that affect (Chickering, 1969; Gross, 2015). As participants relayed their experience, they also shared a range of emotions they experienced during their time away from campus: calm, stressed, hopeless, ambivalent, optimistic, bummed, irritated, unproductive, restless, bored, trapped, determined, frustrated, resigned, scared, lonely, hopeful, disappointed, isolated, mildly depressed, reluctant déjà vu, numb, content, down, constrained, relieved, fearful, salty, satisfied, accomplished, angry, and grieved.

Participants were asked about how they thought their mental well-being was during their time away from campus. Responses generally fell into three categories: students who thought they were doing well, students who experienced ups and downs of the normal academic year, and students who felt as though they had experienced a difficult period of time, usually somewhere between the middle of April and the middle of May.

"I'm pretty good." One of the responses from some students could be categorized as feeling like they were doing quite well. One student, Eric, indicated that once he had established three of the things that were important for him to function well, he was able to adapt and do quite well. For him, being able to exercise, being able to remain intellectually engaged, and staying connected with friends make the context somewhat irrelevant. Maxwell also commented that he felt he was doing pretty well. He attributed his well-being to being able to still connect with friends via digital platforms. And Thomas, even though he recognized the loss, continued to feel as though he was doing pretty well. "I feel like my mental health and well-being. It's really pretty well. I'm pretty good. But still, there's like, there's a loss" (Thomas, personal communication, May 2020).

"I feel like it could be better but I mean, could be a lot worse, too". A second category of response could be characterized by students who mentioned they felt as though their mental health was generally pretty good even though it did change based on the day or the circumstances. Annie indicated that she thought her mental health was:

> Pretty healthy, just considering you know I'm not, I'm personally not dealing with anything like depression or anxiety. Other than the normal ups and downs of life so definitely even though I'm experiencing low moments. They're not like [sic] they're not prolonged. (Annie, personal communication, May 2020)

and Jean shared that "it could definitely be better, but it's not like ruining my day" (Jean, personal communication, May 2020). Hannah stated that although she had experienced a range of emotions over the past few months, she believed she was doing better than some of her friends were. Frank shared the following: "I've been low, but like, now I know I'm going back [to Citytown]. I know I'm going to see people again I know I'm gonna get hugged again, I

know all those things are gonna happen so I'm back up to at least refilling that bar" (Frank, personal communication, May 2020). Matthew summed up his experience by saying "I feel like it could be better but I mean, could be a lot worse, too" (Matthew, personal communication, May 2020).

"I hit a pretty low point during this semester." The third category of response was students who shared that being away from campus was more of a struggle. There were times during the past months that were difficult being able to manage emotions and mental health. When asked about her mental well-being, Laura shared that:

> It felt like was everything is changing and I don't want it to change. I want it to feel as though I had control over something and I didn't like that I didn't There was I hit a pretty low point during this semester where I wouldn't say it was it was full depression. I still went outside of my room and I still ate food, but I started to wonder like, what's going on? Like, this isn't me. I don't like this. I don't like where I'm at. So I started to recognize that my mental health was low because I was like looking at myself and being like, this is not okay. But yeah, it's definitely, it's tanked. (Laura, personal communication, May 2020)

Others discussed how several weeks before the interviews (ranging from mid-April to mid-May), they felt as though they were in a much lower place. When asked how she would rate her mental health on a scale from 1-10, with 10 being the highest, Grace shared:

> Right now I'm like doing like pretty well honestly probably like a seven. I think if you would ask me like a few weeks ago, I would have felt like a lot lower, but I feel like I've kind of like recouped since then. (Grace, personal communication, May 2020)

Melanie shared a similar experience that she started the time at home feeling okay, hit a rough spot, and then began to feel better: “I feel like I was doing okay at the beginning of quarantine mentally and then kind of hit a low somewhere like totally three weeks ago, and now I'm sort of like it was just kind of fairly low until three weeks ago and now I feel like I've kind of been on an upturn” (Melanie, personal communication, May 2020). Students shared that over the course of the three months, individuals could experience a myriad of emotion. Isabelle shared: “Honestly [sic] name an emotion and I’ve probably felt it over the last few weeks” (Isabelle, personal communication, May 2020).

Students responses that fell into the third category mentioned how sometimes they chose to suppress the emotion rather than use reappraisal to regulate the emotions. Melanie, who expressed difficulties in acclimating to life at home as an adult child mentioned: “I'm just kind of like myself [sic] kind of pushing emotions down and then like trying to defuse any, like, family tension. So, so I think because of that, like, I don't really feel, loneliness, or like a lot of anxiety per se, because I've just kind of like suppressed it” (Melanie, personal communication, May 2020). And Laura commented that she did not really talk with many people while at home:

> I couldn't really tell you what a lot of the people that I would typically hang out with have done through quarantine and like how they felt because I think that I was just scared that I was like if I'm in this point and someone else's, by this point or even worse, and I want to make their lives worse, I want to make myself worse trying to talk about all the different things that we're feeling. (Laura, personal communication, May 2020)

As evidenced by comments shared by Laura and Melanie, lack of connection with peers contributed to a sense of being disconnected and lead to some difficult with processing emotions.

*Reappraisal as a way of managing emotions***.** Other participants used reappraisal as a coping strategy for managing emotions (Gross, 2015). Grace stated that for a few weeks in April, she began to notice she was not doing as well mental-health wise and had been withdrawing from people: “I think I had like kind of stopped responding or like reaching out to people, and then I was like this is bad, I need to like talk to people” (Grace, personal communication, May 2020). Several people, including the campus chaplain reached out to her and once she began communicating with others again, she began to feel better. Kate shared that she connected with her close friends every day: “I've had like two or three really close friends through this time that I tell just all my thoughts too and what I'm thinking. And they do the same with me and so just talking through it and not bottling up all my emotions has really helped with being able to cope” (Kate, personal communication, May 2020).

Even though students were not able to see each other in-person as they ordinarily would have, students found creative ways of staying connected. One student found a digital platform, Discord, and invited his friends and family to connect with him in that space. Maxwell indicated that using this server actually benefited communication: “The people that I have really connected with that I, you know, had on the, on the discord server that I've like talked to on a regular basis and so those relationships I think have actually strengthened” (Maxwell, personal communication, May 2020). Kylie mentioned that finding new ways of connecting had been critical:

> I like to stay in touch with my friends. We text we FaceTime we send each other funny tik toks. And that just, just having that sense of relationship, even from a distance is very important. And, you know, having people who can make you laugh, even when you're not face to face with them. (Kylie, personal communication, May 2020)

Creating routines and staying connected seemed to be two common themes of mental well-being. Luke shared that he and his friends set up a weekly ritual of connecting via digital platforms to meet and talk with each other, sometimes including themes, such as dressing a particular way, which has helped them adjust:

> We have a bigger group of college people, where every Thursday we've been doing it. We have like a team, zoom meeting where we like pick out like some, like, weird way to dress like the first day, we did hat day dress a bit somebody else day . . . it's like that helped to keep us sane or whatever, however you want to say it. (Luke, personal communication, May 2020)

Laura began to feel better when she decided to share with others about how she was doing:

> I talked to a couple friends of mine, you know, I think I opened up a bit more, which I think was therapeutic because not because they were helping, but more just because I was getting it off my chest and just be like, I don't feel good . . . . I can't hold it in anymore and I just need to get over the fact that everyone's going through this and just get it off my chest. (Laura, personal communication, May 2020)

Students reported that when they connected with friends and talked about how they felt, they indicated experiencing less depression and less anxiety.

In addition to experiencing the benefits of reappraisal with peers, two participants also mentioned how much better they felt after they had connected with a staff member from ABC University. These interactions were initiated by a staff member and both participants reported that their interactions were extremely positive for them.

Developing autonomy: "The biggest struggle is just feeling like going backwards".

Another theme participants discussed during the interviews was the concept of independence,

which is connected to Chickering's (1969) student development vector of developing autonomy. Chickering (1969) asserted that there are three vital aspects of developing autonomy: "(1) the development of emotional independence, (2) the development of instrumental independence, and (3) the recognition of interdependence" (p. 57). Of the 16 participants who were interviewed, fourteen of them were living with their family at their family home, while one participant was living off-campus with a friend and his friend's family, and one participant was living with their grandparents as their parents lived in another country. Many participants shared that moving back home for a longer time than a short vacation period or summer break had brought about both difficulties and benefits. When asked where she was living at the time of the interview, Kylie described her location as "my childhood bedroom" (personal communication, May 2020). Melanie commented on the difficulty of finding the balance of moving back home as an adult.

> On campus I feel like I kind of got to like a freedom, sort of thing, and I experienced freedom with myself and, you know, and I have that autonomy kind of when I'm with my parents too, but it's less and their influence is definitely stronger when I'm at home. And so I didn't really want to go back to that . . . . I think that has been probably the biggest struggle is just feeling like going backwards. (Melanie, personal communication, May 2020)

Laura reflected a similar sentiment:

> I told myself once I graduated high school, I was never going to live in my parents basement after that, and I'm in my parent's [sic] basement. I told myself once I graduated high school, I was never going to live in my parents' basement after that, and I'm in my parent's basement . . . I didn't know and neither did my parents know how to process having a basically a young adult in the house, you know, how do you how do you fit into

> the family structure again but still feel like you're independent [sic]. (Laura, personal communication, May 2020)

Similar to Laura, Kate commented on the fact that it was not only she who was having to adjust to being back home, but her family needed to adjust to her being back home as well. “When I had to come back they were like, kind of upset because they didn't really want me there because they were used to me being gone, but also we were happy like that I could be home, just to like spend time with family through like the craziness of everything going on” (Kate, personal communication, May 2020). Students would sometimes feel torn because, while they were struggling to maintain a separate sense of self, they were also thankful for the provisions provided as Laura mentions: “I think it's been kind of nice to kind of have everything already figured out like foodwise and like bedwise and you know like all of the things that your parents just have to care about” (Laura, personal communication, May 2020).

“I love spending time with my family.” Although trying to navigate autonomy while moving back home felt like going backwards for some students, many students also reported that they were pleasantly surprised by time they were able to spend with their family. Isabelle remarked: “I've always been very family oriented I love spending time with my family. And so this is, this has been really nice for me. I live in, you know, school focusing it's, it's given me a chance to kind of be home and still have my own life and so kind of connect them together has been, it's been really a blessing, honestly” (Isabelle, personal communication, May 2020). Others mentioned specific family members they really enjoyed spending time with, such as siblings, nephews, and parents. Annie shared: “And I forget how good of a friend my mom can be to me. And so I think, I think this has actually been good for our relationship. And with my dad as well” (Annie, personal communication, May 2020). When asked if there was anything

good about moving away from campus, over half of the participants mentioned that being able to spend extended amounts of time with their family had been one of the benefits. Approximately half of the students also indicated that the food quality had improved and that they had enjoyed eating and cooking with family, which some of them feel will prepare them for when they settle into their respective off-campus houses next year.

Developing interpersonal relationships: "We've been through this horrible time together." Another theme that arose during the interviews was friendship and peer support. Chickering (1969) refers to this vector as managing interpersonal relationships, which includes an "(1) increased tolerance and respect for those of different backgrounds and (2) a shift in the quality of relationships with intimates and close friends" (p. 94). As stated in the literature review, social support is seen as a protective factor against mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety. Part of my research was interested to learn what happened to peer relationships during the time away from campus since students could no longer communicate in person. This next section discusses participants' insights on core friendships, periphery friendships, and the larger sense of community.

Strengthening of close friendships: "I honestly think they've gotten better." Annie, Brenna, Jean, Kylie, Frank, Grace, Hannah, Luke, and Maxwell all mentioned that their core friendships were even stronger than they had been before. As Brenna shared:

> I have developed a strong support system at ABC through the friends I've met there and so it's not as hard to get through something even like we're really blessed with technology I can still like talk to my friends every day. It's not like I'm being shipped off and never been talking to them. (Brenna, personal communication, May 2020)

Students remained connected even when there was not much to talk about. Jean said that she and her friends connected frequently even when there wasn't much going on: "you wouldn't think that there's a lot to talk about because nobody does anything but we just found a way" (Jean personal communication). Frank shared that he was pleased that his friendships were doing as well as they were: "So I'd say they've grown deeper and changed in a way that I don't know. I think it's better because I don't think they're going to go back to being surface relationships with the ones that have grown. That's nice" (Frank, personal communication, May 2020). Maxwell suggested that the bonds friends have shared have strengthened in part because of their shared experience of COVID-19:

> We've been through this horrible time together and we've been each other's sources of kind of tapping out of reality for for a while and just being with each other even digitally for a good amount of time each day is, you know, rejuvenating, and definitely necessary for this and that for sure strengthens relationships and bonds. (Maxwell, personal communication, May 2020)

Many of the participants indicated that they used technology to connect with their friends either through video calls (Zoom, Microsoft Teams), phone calls, Netflix parties, playing games together on the internet, texting, sending Tik Toks, Face Time, and Discord. In some ways, students felt as though they just changed location of communication. Jean stated: "So it's just kind of moving everything into that online format. But it's still like connecting with people, so that's good" (Jean, personal communication, May 2020). For Luke, connecting online allowed him to connect with multiple friends at a time:

> I honestly think they've gotten better, because, like, that's not just face to face, talking so like, you can, like, spread out your energy around. Like, I'm going to talk to you, but like

> while I'm waiting for you to respond. I'm going to talk to this other friend. (Luke, personal communication, May 2020)

Hannah shared that she was pleasantly surprised by how she had been able to connect with her friends, even though mediated communication was her only option: “Actually being able to stay in contact with people. I've gotten very comfortable with FaceTime and calls at night. I used to hate making calls. Like I hated phone calls but, [I’ve] gotten comfortable with that” (Hannah, personal communication, May 2020).

Loss of acquaintances: “One of the things I think I miss the most is seeing people that maybe I'm not the closest friends with.” An interesting aspect of the study revealed participants’ insights into what happened with friendships that were not as close as core friendships. Approximately half of the participants indicated that their friendships with people they were not as close with, typically people they would run into around campus or in their residences, had pretty much dissolved. Eric agreed that while he had maintained his close friendships, the circle of people he connects with was much smaller than it used to be:

> I spend more time talking to like my closer friends than just people that like I kind of hang out with. So I guess the group is like narrowed a little bit. But, um, I think those friendships have like gone like stayed the same or gone stronger because it's more intentional now. (Eric, personal communication, May 2020)

Hannah shared a similar sentiment and said she missed bumping into people on campus that she was not longer keeping in touch with:

> But then there's a lot of people who like, I was just not exactly close enough to that like I don't text with them a lot. But they're those people who would see, like, almost every day or like every other day in the dining hall or whatever and it's just like wonder how they're

> doing, because like, there's just like no connection. And then it's like sadness. (Hannah, personal communication, May 2020)

Melanie also commented: “With my close friends, I feel like we still keep in touch pretty well. Both other people who were kind of, like we were friends but we didn't really talk that much. They've kind of, I don't know. I haven't really talked to them much at all” (Melanie, personal communication, May 2020). Kate shared that friendships that were just beginning did not continue when she moved away from campus:

> And then my friendships that I was just starting to create like I had met some people in January, and in my like second spring semester classes, those were negatively impacted because we weren't able to spend time in-person together, because we had just met and we're just starting off and so not being able to hang out in person, kind of put those relationships to a stop. (Kate, personal communication, May 2020)

Matthew offered a suggestion as to why some friendships didn’t continue once students moved away from the residence: “I think I think it stays the same for like you know your core friendships but like the people that you just kind of coincidentally bumped into well you're not bumping into them anymore so you know I'm really engaging with them as much” (Matthew, personal communication, May 2020).

Maxwell and Laura echoed the sentiment of lost friendships. Maxwell stated: “There's some certain people that I was like on the floor with or like acquaintances with that have . . . haven't been, or wasn't like the best friends with per se. And those have all been like completely lost (Maxwell, personal communication, May 2020) and Laura shared “the stories and the stuff that you hear at the dining hall and on the way to class, like there [sic] was non-existent” (Laura, personal communication, May 2020). Thomas observed a similar pattern when he said:

> You miss really a lot of the little interactions that you might have with people who maybe aren't close friends but you see them in passing, or on way to class, you don't really get that as much now, because that's one of the things I think I miss the most is seeing people that maybe I'm not the closest friends with but I see consistently. (Thomas, personal communication, May 2020)

Even though technology seemed to assist some of the participants with remaining connected to their core friendships, some of the participants attributed the lack of continuity of the periphery friendships to awkwardness of reaching out over a digital platform. Annie offered a reason for why this might be the case: "And that's kind of been cut off because it's a lot harder to kind of reach out and connect with those people with the awkwardness added of something like video calling" (Annie, personal communication, May 2020). Thomas agreed that he had not maintained connections with students who were not close friends: "And those are the kinds of people that I feel like I've not really been good, or really pursued like trying to meet over teams or phone calls or things like that" (Thomas, personal communication, May 2020).

Making new friends: "It still happens online." Jean had a different experience than some of the others as she found she did make new friends over her time away from campus. As Jean shared:

> You have this expectation of like meeting new people and just making new friends and stuff just because like that's kind of how it goes. And it's still happens online, which I would never have expected, even in my classes we have little breakout discussion groups. And so even then you can kind of joke around with people that you've never met before. (Jean, personal communication, May 2020)

Maxwell added that he had been able to make new friends using technology during COVID-19. Grace and Luke mentioned how they reconnected with people from high school. Grace stated:

> I think also just like random friendships I have like here it's like I haven't seen those people but like I've been talking to them more like, oh, like this thing happened like we're in the same town. We can't hang out, but like now we'll actually FaceTime even though we didn't when I was like at school. (Grace, personal communication, May 2020)

Luke shared that "And then recently, I've also gotten closer with my some of my friends from high school" (Luke, personal communication, May 2020).

Reflections on the importance of community: "They've just become family really in the way that you know we talk to each other and we treat each other." The fourth aspect of relationships many participants talked about was the idea of community. Students shared their stories of what living in community meant to them. Kylie, Jean, Frank, Hannah, Melanie, and Kate all mentioned the feeling of community was part of the reason why they chose to attend ABC. Many of the participants relayed stories of how they had experienced that sense of community and belonging as part of their residence life experience. For Jean, this sense of community included spending time with each other:

> With the RA and everything they're very good at getting a community on the floor with like a group chat and just having everybody go to dinner together and just do random events which is like kind of cheesy at first but it really did help. And so randomly I just have people knocking on my door and asking me to go to like Applebee's at like midnight or something crazy or just go out and like get gas like just tiny little things that are kind of built up and helped form relationships on the fourth floor which is really nice. (Jean, personal communication, May 2020)

For other participants, community had been experienced by sharing of thoughts and ideas together. Kylie shared:

> We have the nicest dorm, in my opinion. And, yeah, there's just a really great community there. A lot of people with a lot of different interests, we have the living learning floors, which is really cool. And, yeah, they just they make life fun . . . . they've just become family really in the way that you know we talk to each other and we treat each other and just the intentionality behind our community is really important and that's been that's been really a critical experience for me at ABC. (Kylie, personal communication, May 2020)

Grace shared how much she loved being involved in her community and felt as though her residence community had been her main social support network:

> I love being in res life . . . We do like a lot of like floor trips like backpacking or like we go canoeing and so that just like built community really well. Um, yeah, I'd say like a bulk of my friends came from like being in res life like my roommate is like my best friend and like I like was really close with everybody who I lived with. (Grace, personal communication, May 2020)

For Thomas, community was something he did not anticipate as part of his decision-making process, but he had been pleasantly surprised that he had experienced a strong sense of community at ABC University:

> I found to be a really just amazing community, [sic] one of the things that I never realized when I was making my spreadsheet or even thinking about the really more quantitative aspects of what a university experience might be like is really the community aspect of it. I found that living on the honors floor in the honors community has been a really super

> positive influence on myself and sort of in my interaction with others just living in a community of people who are all really like striving and focused on their academics and learning and just really curious people was amazing and I think that that has been fantastic. (Thomas, personal communication, May 2020)

Annie expressed how developing intentional relationships with others had shaped her in profound ways. She stated that being in her living learning community has:

> . . . super, super impacted my life and my mission. Just because I had the chance to live with you know so many other students from different backgrounds, whether it be you know students of color, students from other countries, students just from different economic backgrounds. And I learned a lot from those friends like a lot of late-night conversations about racism or about things that have affected people's lives or, you know, friends who are coming from inner city situations that just completely foreign to me. And that's definitely had a huge, huge impact on how I looked at things in my classes [sic] how I looked at my major, how I've like gone about, you know, learning about social justice and making that part of my life. (Annie, personal communication, May 2020)

A few participants mentioned how much they miss the ABC University community. Kylie shared that she really missed the faith aspect of the community:

> It's been challenging I would say not having not having sort of the . . . how do I word this? Sort of the examples set by the ABC community whether that's my professors who are still doing a really good job doing like devotions or prayers in class, or having the spiritual life team, which we still have done like weekly Bible study meetings on zoom. And that's been nice but it's been different. (Kylie, personal communication, May 2020)

Hannah described how it was physically difficult to not be part of the ABC community because it was easier to care for someone in person:

> Just trying to keep in contact with friends and check in with those who aren't doing so well. Really makes you aware how many people have, like, are susceptible to depression, and how much community affects that. And it's really hard when like friends are going through stuff and you can't like give them a hug because you're thousands of miles away. (Hannah, persona communication, May 2020)

Along with Hannah, a number of other students mentioned that being physically separated from their friends was really difficult for them.

Managing interpersonal relationships is a developmental task as outlined by Chickering (1969). Without the ability to see each other face to face, many of the participants were still able to maintain and even strengthen their core friendships. However, the majority of the participants expressed a sadness about the fact they missed developing friendships with people whom they no longer bumped into by virtue of living on same floor, eating in the dining hall, or seeing each other in class. In addition, several students commented that they missed the sense of community experienced at ABC University.

Developing competencies: "The [online] class experience is just not as good academically." For many of the participants, moving academics online was the first time they had taken an online class. Students discussed the implications of moving to online classes, which can be connected to Chickering's (1969) developing competence vector. Competencies refers to accomplishments in the areas of intellect, physical, and/or interpersonal (Chickering, 1969). While in university, many students gained proficiencies in knowledge, physical accomplishments, and interpersonal relationships. When asked how moving online had impacted

their learning, students expressed mixed responses. Two students mentioned difficulty with language classes in particular. A number of students talked about several difficulties of online classes including motivation, poor internet connection, time zone changes, and expectations. Grace indicated that even though she was a good student, the lack of accountability with online classes increased lack of motivation:

> It's not like you have to show up to class every day you only see your professor's face, nobody was like taking attendance so I like wasn't super inclined to like, stay up to date. Um, so I think in that way I was just like, I'm not like a super self-discipline person and so like online school for me was like not a great situation. (Grace, personal communication, May 2020)

Motivation was somewhat impacted by the knowledge that students could opt to make two classes pass/fail. Although many expressed gratitude for that option, for a few participants, that option disincentivized them from putting in as much effort into their classes as they ordinarily would have. As Grace indicated: "This semester like there was a lot of times where I was like, oh, like, I don't have to like work as hard so like, I'm not going to like, oh they're gonna give me a pass fail like so I guess I will use that" (Grace, personal communication, May 2020). Participants also reported they were more motivated to put in effort if the classes were for their major. One student, Brenna, felt she had invested more effort since her internship class had moved online: "I knew those semesters would be really hard *with* [emphasis added] the internship. I didn't think it would be really hard because I *didn't* [emphasis added] have the internship" (Brenna, personal communication, May 2020).

For a few other students, two other sources of frustration emerged with regard to their internet connection and the different time zones. As Annie stated: "My connection may not be

good. That just makes things difficult or I think from the point of view of teaching, some things are just more complicated, like all of all of [sic] my teachers use different platforms" (Annie personal communication, May 2020). Thomas shared that he made the decision not to go home for the duration of the academic year in part because of the poor internet connection at home.

Laura and Frank both noted their struggle with time zone differences. Frank shared that because he lived on the west coast, he was getting up sometimes at 5:30 am to attend classes that were given in the eastern time zone. Laura tried to stay on eastern time for a while but then found it quickly competed with her family's schedule: "I was going to stay on [eastern] time to help with classes, but that was difficult because I would want to have dinner at four o'clock here and my Dad wouldn't even be out of work" (Laura, personal communication, May 2020).

Regarding expectations, students remarked that they understood it was difficult for professors to transition everything online so quickly but having clear expectations would have been helpful for them, They also noted that because their courses used multiple platforms that meant students had a more difficult time keeping track of all of the requirements. As Hannah explained:

> Suddenly had to monitor more stuff like you already had to look at your email but now you have to look at Teams because that's where some people post stuff, or more on Moodle for some classes who would never use Moodle before. And then, emails, but you're getting 20 emails a day and if you miss one you suddenly miss the class, which, for a lot of people was a struggle because just no professor did it the same. (Hannah, personal communication, May 2020)

Students also struggled with integrity regarding taking tests. Several students mentioned having tests that were not open book or open note was difficult because, not only were they tempted to

use resources available to them, they wondered if classmates were accessing resources and using texts that would put their peers at an advantage.

Some advantages to online academics. Other participants mentioned that they appreciated the transition to online classes because of ease of delivery and flexible schedule. Eric stated that his transition to online school has not been difficult:

> . . . it hasn't been too bad like [sic]. Aside from a few courses most of those stayed pretty similar to how I've done it before . . . . . I've gotten really good at looking stuff up. Like I'd say I'm pretty elite at that now whereas before it's just memorization. (Eric, personal communication, May 2020)

Some students enjoyed being able to listen to recordings at times and speeds that were convenient for them. Participants also commented that recordings allowed them to listen more attentively as they could keep their hands busy while listening. As Hannah expressed: “I'm very kinetic. And so being able to like move, while listening helps me focus. And so, something has been positive. And like the freedom to like watch that and do that pretty much whenever it's a lot more flexibility” (Hannah, personal communication, May 2020).

Eric and Frank appreciated not having to wake up for their early morning classes anymore because the course was now recorded, Maxwell appreciated the fact that one of his classes over lunch was now recorded because otherwise he would have had classes straight through from 11:30am to 3:30pm several days a week. And Thomas liked being able to learn at his own pace: “I get a lot more freedom to either like watch a lecture at double speed, or just skip over lectures that I didn't need, which that has been good” (Maxwell, personal communication, May 2020).

Students also mentioned how much they missed the environment that was dedicated to academics and in-person classes where students learned from each other's comments and questions. According to Jean, "you're missing the whole conversation. Part of it where it's like you can ask what I mean you could still ask questions, and email but yeah I definitely did not get a lot out of it. After that, she added with laughter that "it made me miss the classes that I didn't think I even liked" (Jean, personal communication, May 2020). As stated earlier, Frank and Isabelle struggled with knowing how to ask questions during an online class.

Overall, most students stated they preferred in-person classes. As Annie states, "I definitely feel like the [online] class experience is just not as good academically" (Annie, personal communication, May 2020). Others mentioned they do not feel as though they learned very much. As Frank explained:

> It'll be interesting to see how much I actually did learn because I don't, I feel like I've learned a lot, because I had to teach myself everything, but also when you teach yourself stuff you don't know if you're hitting the right points that you need to learn for the next classes because professors kind of direct you in that way. (Frank, personal communication, May 2020)

Luke agreed: "I think it was quite a bit harder, because you basically have to teach it all yourself, rather than this go to class" (Luke, personal communication, May 2020).

Interestingly, a few other students found their transition to online classes went smoothly, to the point where they have signed up for a summer class. Maxwell mentioned that he would not have signed up for a summer class if he had not experienced the past semester online.

*Use of technology: Mixed reactions***.** As part of the focus group, the participants were asked if they thought technology helped or hindered them over the past few months. There were mixed reactions to this question.

Difficulty: "I constantly was thinking I could multitask when I really couldn't." A few students mentioned the difficulty of keeping academic time and leisure time separate because they were both delivered on the same platform. Isabelle and Kylie both mentioned that their cell phone in particular was a huge distraction. As Isabelle shared: "I'll just put on some music on my TV and oh it's okay for watching episode real quick, and you know stuff like that it just, I constantly was thinking I could multitask when I really couldn't" (Isabelle, personal communication, May 2020). Kylie mentioned she often lost sleep due to her smartphone: "And as far as like sleeping goes, I do tend to get distracted by my phone when I should be sleeping. And that is a growing problem but I'm maintaining it the best I can" (Kylie, personal communication, May 2020).

A few participants also mentioned that it was difficult having school, personal communication, and entertainment all accessed through digital formats because it blurred the lines and made time blend together. During one of the focus groups, Melanie shared:

> Just having school on the computer, there wasn't really for me a separation between like leisure time and school time because it's both on the same device and I could even have like both windows open at the same. Um, so it just . . . yeah, kind of felt monotonous. (Melanie, personal communication, May 2020)

Luke agreed with Melanie in the group conversation and added: "Yeah, I agree with Melanie. So like, classes on my laptop also want to use like watch movies and everything, like, oh, nothing

stopping me from just putting on the lecture, sitting back and going on my phone" (Luke, personal communication, May 2020).

Laura found herself using technology so much that she got tired of it and tried to drastically reduce her amount of social time spent with technology. Since she has moved back to Citytown, she shared with the group that her smartphone usage was down 75%. Thomas decided to employ a different strategy which allowed him to maintain a separation of school and leisure time by only using technology for school and finding other things to do during time away from school such as reading.

Appreciation: "I'm just really grateful for the connectivity that technology provides." During a focus group, Kate and Brenna expressed how appreciative they were for technology. Brenna stated her appreciated for technology with the following:

> I'm just really grateful for the connectivity that technology provides. It's not as isolating to be in quarantine when you're able to get in touch with your friend who's like 200 miles away, or you're still able to interview for jobs or internships. You are still able to access your online classes, I think I'm really grateful for just that blessing of still being able to feel connected with people, while still staying inside and staying safe. So I feel like if I didn't have this access to my friends it'd be a lot harder to be isolated from them. I'm not feeling like lost and I'm losing all my time. I'm still able to salvage some quality times my friends and my family that lives farther away. (Brenna, personal communication, May 2020)

Kate agreed with Brenna and added:

> I was just gonna like echo what Brenna said and say I'm really also really thankful for being able to like have technology to communicate with friends about relationships. I just

keep thinking about how, like for instance, I'm like in an obviously long distance relationship right now and I keep thinking about how hard it would be to keep a relationship, if you were like writing letters. (Kate, personal communication, May 2020)

Maxwell made the observation that had COVID-19 happened 50 years ago, we might not have been as well connected: "I am glad that this is happening in a time where we are so connected digitally because even doing this wouldn't be possible if it was 100 years ago, or 50 years ago" (Maxwell, personal communication, May 2020).

Developing identity: "I think that like this pandemic has changed my life and it's really helped to find my character more." One of the emerging themes of this research was the idea that students were continuing to learn about themselves as they stepped away from campus. The first interviewees volunteered ways they think they are growing as a person and what they are learning about themselves. By the second day of interviewing, the question of "what are you learning about yourself" was included as part of the semi-structured interview. This idea of self-discovery can be connected to the student development vector of developing identity (Chickering, 1969). Developing identity can be defined as an idea as to how one perceives oneself as well as how one perceives themselves in relationship to others (Erikson, 1994). In other words, identity is a sense of knowing who you are, what you are good at, and how you might contribute to the world (Palmer, 2000). As many researchers agree, the particular age of emerging adulthood is a critical time for developing identity (Arnett, 2015; Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009).

A number of students indicated that this time away from campus had been a time of self-reflection. Jean stated that this time "forces you to reflect about yourself" (Jean, personal communication, May 20202) and Maxwell surmised that "being isolated provokes introspection"

(Maxwell, personal communication, May 2020). The time of self-reflection led to insights regarding strengths, identity, the idea of control, and weaknesses. Many students found that they could handle more than they thought they could. As Brenna noted:

> I think that like this pandemic has changed my life and it's really helped to find my character more and like helped me learn that like yes, I can adjust and work through even like a pandemic or like world ending circumstances, and like that just speaks a lot to like, who I am as a person. (Brenna, personal communication, May 2020)

Eric also stated: "I'm just kind of like, forcing myself to kind of grind through things myself, which I think has been overall a positive thing, even though it's been harder" (Eric, personal communication, May 2020). Matthew observed that he has not been rattled by this and had tried to move forward:

> You can get down and upset and angry and whatnot, and you know just be miserable or you go, 'this sucks but whatever, we're going to deal with it', and you know you control how you respond. It's up to you whether or not you're going to you know get stuck down or if you're just going to go through it. (Matthew, personal communication, May 2020)

Thomas spoke to this concept as well when asked what he was learning about himself:

> I can be really goal driven and focused in a crisis, which this is sort of an evolving sort of discovery of myself, both through like this past year and even up until now that like, I'm sort of in a crisis situation I feel like I'm really well equipped to analyze scenario and the options that I have before me, and to proceed with a clear head. (Thomas, personal communication, May 2020)

As an extrovert who found he filled his free time while at ABC University with social activities, Eric realized that he liked being alone more than he thought he would:

> I thought I would be a person that would really struggle with this whole thing. I think I realized that like, I don't mind kind of being alone or I don't mind like taking time where like it's not super loud all the time just kind of like sitting back and like watching a TV show by myself or like reading a book by myself. (Eric, personal communication, May 2020)

On the other hand, for Frank and Luke, they learned how much they like being around people. Frank said "I've learned I can live without people but that's just not the optimal. Because like I guess I'm not. but I can, I've learned I can. I don't know it's hard to explain but I learned how extroverted I really am" (Frank, personal communication, May 2020). Luke shared that having connections with friends was how he got through the days: "My biggest takeaway is like pretty much like how much I relied on friends, like [how] I've structured my day and support" (Luke, personal communication, May 2020).

Jean struggled with the idea of moving backwards into a space that did not fit with her identity anymore: "It kind of made me feel so much more like it felt like I moved backwards two years, and I was like living in the place of somebody who isn't really who I am anymore" (Jean, personal communication, May 2020). For Isabelle, being home with family reaffirmed her identity. "Having a family is, you know, definitely one of my callings and I kind of spend extra time with my family kind of taught me to have both, you know I don't really have to choose between having family or knowledge and education and job and all that" (Isabelle, personal communication, May 2020). Several students commented on their own realization of how they manage their time. Melanie explained her revelation regarding how she used her time:

> I like set goals for myself and then, and then I'll be like, "oh wait, I don't have time to do this or like", I usually it's time actually. I don't have time to do something. And now I'm

> kind of at home and I mean I technically do have the time to do it but like I still haven't done a lot of stuff and it's just kind of like putting it off. And so that's kind of been confirmation of like it was never about having enough time to do it [sic] it was about priorities. (Melanie, personal communication, May 2020)

Some students shared how letting go of control and expectations had been healthy for them. Jean surmised: “I really do go into so many things with just this expectation set for myself and like how I think it's gonna happen. And like kind of letting go of that. I think it's actually really good for me” (Jean, personal communication, May 2020). Kate shared a similar insight:

> I had thought that I constantly need to be around people and I constantly need to have a plan for my life, and like my future. And I have realized that, no matter how much I plan, or think I know what's gonna happen, or how things are gonna be, things can come out of nowhere and be very unexpected and you just kind of have to go with it, and remain true to yourself through the unknown. (Kate, personal communication, May 2020)

Annie shared that the idea of letting go of control had solidified her faith identity. She stated that she was learning:

> I don't actually have control over things that are happening I don't have control over my jobs, a bit like stability or over my school situation or any of those things, and like learning to be comfortable with that and also not have the illusion that I'm in control, and to enter believe that God's plan for my life is still good. (Annie, personal communication, May 2020)

Part of letting go of control means a realization of vulnerability. Kylie stated that “many of us just learning how fragile I am as a human being, like, you know, this is something that we never

saw coming, and we don't really know what to do right now" (Kylie, personal communication, May 2020). Hannah agreed with this sentiment and stated:

> I sort of got complacent thinking it wouldn't happen in the U.S., and just being like relearning that that's possible no matter how advanced society gets or thinks they are like, I know that all humans, no matter where you live are vulnerable to that. (Hannah, personal communication, May 2020)

Matthew added: "But it's really humbling when something happens like this and you know the whole world is kind of brought down to its knees because you know as far as we've gone, we still are known or near invincible, that's even possible" (Matthew, personal communication, May 2020).

For some students, realizing their weaknesses brought about a new resiliency. Kylie shared her insight: "I just think that I've learned a lot about what I can handle. And what I need to, sort of, maybe create ways to handle better" (Kylie, personal communication, May 2020). Laura summarized her perspective with the following observation: "I'm stronger than I think I am . . . . And I think my maturity level, even though I came back home has definitely benefited from this" (Laura, personal communication, May 2020). Through self-reflection, Kate became aware of a bigger picture: "And it's not just all about me. And what I'm thinking and overthinking and my emotions. There are other people who are going through stuff with us too. And so that that was something that I had to overcome" (Kate, personal communication, May 2020).

Developing purpose: "Maybe I can make the world a better place through the job that I'm doing." The sixth and seventh student development vectors are closely related. The sixth vector, developing purpose, refers to following goal not motivated by fear or guilt (Chickering,

1969; Erikson, 1994) and the seventh vector, integrity, is connected to developing "internal consistency" (Chickering, 1969, p. 123). For university students, developing purpose is closely related to choosing a major and moving toward occupational goals (Chickering, 1969). Palmer and Zajonc furthered this concept of a deeper purpose by sharing this quote from Harry Lewis, a former dean at Harvard University: ". . . universities have forgotten their main purpose, which is to help students 'learn who they are, to search for a larger purpose for their lives and to leave college as better human beings'" (Lewis, 2007, as cited in Parker & Zajonc, 2010, p. 3). In this study, students discussed the idea of purpose much more so than integrity. Several participants indicated that they were finding a greater sense of clarity regarding their purpose while watching the world respond to COVID-19. Pre-med and nursing students spoke of how they see first responders attending to the sick and then being able to picture themselves in their shoes. As a biology pre-med major, Eric shared:

> Like as a bio major in some way that's like on a pre-med sort of track, like whatever you hear about like the hospitals being overworked. And like, different doctors, and like EMTs having to work longer hours than they were prepared to, and just kind of like being able to empathize with, who knows maybe one day that could be me and kind of keeping that in mind . . . . when you can like see yourself in that position, I think it allows you to connect a lot more to those sorts of people. (Eric, personal communication, May 2020)

Kate mentioned her nursing major and how the pandemic reminded her of how important her chosen profession really was. Frank went on to explain that following the process of finding a vaccine had been interesting to him as he was studying organic Chemistry and the pandemic had piqued his interest in disease research.

Maxwell and his science class spent some of their classes talking about the relationship between science and policy. Annie, Melanie, and Isabelle spoke of how the pandemic was bringing more awareness to injustice and inequality issues. Luke spoke of his accounting major and being interested in what was happening to small businesses. Hannah, an economics, philosophy, and political science major, and Melanie, whose interest is linguistics, both spoke of how they are interested in how other countries are responding. Brenna, an education major, spoke of how the pandemic has reinforced her idea that education reform is necessary:

> I have really seen the importance of in-person schooling. And my heart breaks for students that there's like going to school is their safe place [sic]. A lot of us are blessed to be able to have homes they can go to that are safe or taken care of. Things are provided for us, but school is a safe place for a lot of students and so, just the importance of access to a safe environment for elementary age children is really important. I've seen that students really thrive in-person classes. I just really realize how much education reform is needed in this country and how school areas are reacting. I have really seen the importance of in-person schooling. And my heart breaks for students that there's like going to school is their safe place. A lot of us are blessed to be able to have homes, they can go to that are safe or taking care of things are provided for us, but school is a safe place for a lot of students and so, just the importance of access to a safe environment for elementary age children is really important. I've seen that students really thrive in-person classes. I just really realize how much education reform is needed in this country and how school areas are reacting. (Brenna, personal communication, May 2020)

Students found that the way they viewed their education was influenced by the practical realities of the pandemic.

As students shared their experience of the time away from campus through the viewpoint of what they were learning in class, many shared a hopeful, engaged response. As a computer science major, Maxwell commented that he had now seen "how important and useful online technologies can be". Kate, a nursing major, summarized her observation by saying:

> It is a great reminder to know how much I'm sacrificing for this job that I'm going to go into, but it also makes me really excited to know that I'll be able to help people and to try and make things like this happen, and like, go away and that maybe I can make the world a better place through the job that I'm doing. (Kate, personal communication, May 2020)

However, clarification of purpose did not occur for every participant. In fact, the routine for some had them experience a loss of purpose for a time. Jean shared that she went through a time when all of the days blurred together and she lost her sense of purpose for a while:

> Why am I waking up like what is the day even for anymore, because like I had a purpose before, but now it's just kind of like just a flatline all the time Why am I waking up? What is the day even for anymore, because like I had a purpose before, but now it's just kind of like just a flatline all the time . . . . so I figured out a routine for like a week. And then after a week it just kind of went downhill like after spring break, it was like, I don't know what I'm doing anymore like there's nothing to do I have nothing to really look forward to. And like the weekends are less exciting than the weekdays now. (Jean, personal communication, May 2020)

Loss: "The whole process can be labeled grief." As Jean shared, many students experienced loss of one type or another. Even though there were no questions asked directly connected to loss, all but one participant reflected about something they had lost. Losses that were discussed by participants included loss of connection with others (friends), loss of

opportunities (internships, jobs, leadership roles, travel), loss of security (routine, control), loss of learning (in class learning experience, academic learning environment, semesters abroad, productivity, motivation), and loss of independence (goals, freedom). A participant described being "robbed of a semester" of what is supposed to be the best years of her life.

> I think the whole process can be labeled grief. I was very fearful at the beginning and then I got very anxious, and then I got really mad. Those are typical stages of grief . . . . we can grieve for the loss of those memories. We can grieve for the life that we once had.

Some of the students described the losses they experienced, such as loss of connection with others and loss of security, as traumatic losses during which students felt grief, fear, and stress.

Loss of connection with others. Some students from out of state felt as though they were missing out, even though the stay at home order existed in the state where ABC is located. Brenna shared that: "I'm gonna miss out when they're all living in our house this summer but now it feels like, not three months I'm missing out, it's six months I'm missing out so it's a little hard". Kate struggled, too, because what she had planned was not going to happen:

> I had a bunch of like big plans that I was working on, and so it was really hard to hear that we were having to move out. So it was something that I was not really looking forward to, but I guess it had to be done. (Kate, personal communication, May 2020)

Kate also mentioned that she felt that one of her greatest difficulties in moving away from campus has been the loss of being able to be with her friend: "being separated my [sic] from my friends has been really difficult for me" (Kate, personal communication, May 2020). Kylie had a similar sentiment as Kate and listed some of what she was going to miss out on, including the dorm banquet and spring camping trip. Maxwell did not want to move home because he had been enjoying the fact that his friends were so readily accessible by virtue of the fact that they

lived in the same residence. Laura talked about loss of connection with friend as being an emotional loss as well as an academic loss: **"**I really didn't want to leave my friends because like, they were my rocks, and that's who I studied with" (Laura, personal communication, May 2020).

Loss of security. In addition to the loss of connection with others and loss of opportunities, students felt a loss of control and security. This loss of security can lead to a traumatic response. Luke recalls a feeling that "just like everything in the world is changing" (personal communication, May 2020) and Grace and Laura were unnerved by the rate of change they experienced. Grace recalls "nobody knew what was going on, so I remember that was really stressful" (Grace, personal communication, May 2020) and Laura shared:

> It felt like was everything is changing and I don't want it to change. I want it to feel as though I had control over something and I didn't like that I didn't It felt like was everything is changing and I don't want it to change. I want it to feel as though I had control over something and I didn't like that I didn't . . . . I would say I feel more secure when I have a plan and not having a plan was really hard. (Laura, personal communication, May 2020)

Hannah spoke about having to find a new way of doing things as "those systems we'd already set up were taken away. those systems we'd already set up were taken away" (Hannah, personal communication, May 2020). One student alluded to food security issues while things began to shut down on campus: "more felt more like a prison where you have to like, wait, wait your turn, eat your food" (Luke, personal communication, May 2020) and later described the food as subpar. Another student mentioned housing security issues as well. Going home for Thomas was not as much of an option due to the expense and the poor internet connection at home:

> And that was enormously stressful so that night I called my parents, and most of my friends to try and find a place where I could go and sort of weather this out, whether it would be for the rest of the semester or just for a couple of weeks just to find someplace to go. (Thomas, personal communication, May 2020)

***Loss of opportunities*.** Some of the discussion of loss centered around the losing opportunities. Annie had planned to travel oversees to Asia assist her in becoming certified to teach English (TEFL) this summer but that has been plan has been cancelled due to COVID-19. Annie had also planned another trip to a different Asian country in the fall, but those plans are uncertain at the moment as well: "It's hard to imagine what the future is going to be like and you know all of the things I have kind of planned academically and career wise are, you know, very shaky at the moment" (Annie, personal communication, May 2020). For Annie, travel was not just about academic and career pursuits; she had hoped to visit close friends in both of those countries.

Brenna commented on the loss of ability to practice the skills she will need post-graduation. As an education major, Brenna had begun an internship she was really excited about but had to leave that internship due to COVID-19: "I was really, really sad. My roommate and I cried. We both had internships this semester at local elementary schools. And we had just started like the beginning of February or like mid-February and we were really excited about it" (Brenna, personal communication, May 2020).

Approximately half of the student were leaders in some capacity on campus. Frank discussed his situation in that he lost the opportunity to continue to lead his on-campus club: "We had our second event during the spring semester and that kind of just fell, because there was nobody at school anymore so you can't have an event, there's no one there" (Frank, personal

communication, May 2020). Kate mentioned she lost the ability to lead and plan events for her residence.

Grace and her roommate had hoped to do a lot of things with the time they had left together until they realized how quickly things changed. “My roommate and I were like, we're gonna like go do things around town and everything before you realize like we're supposed to be like quarantining and like all that so it's kind of like okay like we'll just have some fun and all sudden it's like, oh funs over [sic]” (Grace, personal communication, May 2020). Hannah lost a summer internship due to COVID-19.

Loss of learning. Almost all of the students commented on a loss of learning. Annie shared: “I think the learning is kind of the biggest loss there. A lot of materials and a lot of resources that are just sort of made difficult by going online” (Annie, personal communication, May 2020). Matthew commented on the fact that it was disappointing to miss out on half a semester, and Isabelle stated that she struggled with focus and motivation while being at home. Eric and Maxwell articulated that they missed the academic environment in which to learn. Eric stated:

> The one benefit of like doing things with other people is that you can like learn a lot from the people you're around so like if it's studying like you learn a lot like how like how [sic] they prepare. And like even just like hearing what they know helps you kind of like, or helps me at least kind of internalize it. (Eric, personal communication, May 2020)

Thomas agreed with Eric and said he missed out on the contributions of his classmates: “It's also challenging to because I feel like even if I think that I know what's going on if someone has a question sometimes additional clarification can be added, which is beneficial to me, which I've missed” (Thomas, personal communication, May 2020). Maxwell made connections between his

environment and his motivation: “I didn't realize before how important an encompassing academic environment was especially for motivation” (Maxwell, personal communication, May 2020).

A number of students also noticed they felt they lost the opportunity to engage with class material by asking questions. Due to the online format, students were often unsure of when to ask questions. As Frank articulated:

> It's so much more difficult to ask a question in an online format because it's not like I can just raise my hand or anything you have to like, turn on your mic and talk and it's, it's hard to interrupt a professor, when he's giving a lecture online, compared to in person, because in-person he puts something on the board and you're like I have a question about that. (Frank, personal communication, May 2020)

Isabelle mentioned that she did not learn as much because she didn’t feel as though she could ask questions and Isabelle shared a similar sentiment: “If you have questions, you can't just raise your hand and be like, what does that mean?” (Isabelle, personal communication, May 2020). However, not all students felt restricted to ask questions by the online format. Maxwell shared that he appreciated having some of his classes meet synchronously for that exact reason: “It was definitely still good to have synchronous classes and to still be able to interact live with the professor and see the professor and see my classmates and be able to ask questions right away” (Maxwell, personal communication, May 2020).

Loss of goals. A large number of participants discussed the concept of being an adult who was moving back into the family home. This concept will be further explored under the theme of developing autonomy. Along with navigating that developmental stage, students also experienced a loss of the ability to pursue their personal goals. Brenna shared about an ambitious

personal goal of completing certain things which was interrupted by COVID-19. “I had a list of things I wanted to do before I turned 20. And then I turned 20 and I didn't get to get a lot of those things done, because I've been living here” (Brenna, personal communication, May 2020). Even though she expressed trepidation about growing up, Jean shared that by moving home and away from school, she felt like she was developmentally behind:

> It's like a weird thing because in the back of your head, there's always like this fear of like leaving [home] and like that independence and growing up and having other responsibilities too, but it's like, it's something that I feel like I should be doing. But I'm not. And it's like, oh you're setting yourself behind. (Jean, personal communication, May 2020)

Jean expanded by saying: “You just get so used to that independence and then all of a sudden it kind of feels like you're back in high school, which I was not used to” (personal communication, May 2020). Kylie agreed with these sentiments and shared that she felt constrained in some way, too:

> There's so much that I want to do and there's so much that I would rather be doing. And I had these, you know, goals and dreams in my head of what that could be but I feel, I guess trapped in that I can't do that at this very moment. (Kylie, personal communication, May 2020)

Gratitude. Along with loss, students reported a large sense of gratitude. Students were asked if there was anything else they would like me to know as part of their lived experience of moving away from campus due to COVID-19. What was surprising to me was over half of them stated how grateful they were. Frank stated that upon reflection, he was mostly grateful:

> I would say I'm grateful for what I have gotten. And even though I've lost some things like I've lost a lot of the physical connections with people, I have gotten a lot of it least appreciation for what I do still have and what I will have, again, like, it's kind of just like a pause, rather than a complete disconnect. (Frank, personal communication, May 2020)

Kate has taken this time to reflect:

> It has made me realize, to live more in the moment, and to be thankful for the great things than I have in my life. It has made me realize, to live more in the moment, and to be thankful for the great things than I have in my life . . . just really being thankful for the people in my life, and telling them that they mean so much to me. (Kate, personal communication, May 2020)

Kylie also stated that this time has allowed her to reflect on not taking her friends for granted: "I think it's important that we have this time, apart from each other just to realize how critical our friendship is and like the benefits, we get from that" (Kylie, personal communication, May 2020).

Several students also commented that this time has really given them a new perspective. This time was a chance for Annie to think about her own circumstances in relation to others:

> I think that it's made me think a lot about my privilege of having a safe house, home and family, having enough food and, you know, just just a lot of ways that I'm really blessed that I see is not working out for everyone. I think that made me really kind of hyper aware of that and thankful for that. (Annie, personal communication, May 2020)

Isabelle agreed with this sentiment as she reflected on her experience: "I'm very, very thankful of what I do have been [sic] what I have been given. So I just, I really like to you know make sure that that's a prominent theme of this really" (Isabelle, personal communication, May 2020).

Matthew commented: “I really haven't gone through much . . . . It's an inconvenience but it's not an unbearable burden, and I know a lot of people have it worse” (Matthew, personal communication, May 2020). Grace echoed this statement by saying: “[the] Lord is like showing His providence in these ways and it's like part of me is like thankful for like I haven't ended up in like a worse off situation” (Grace, personal communication, May 2020). Many students commented on the fact that they were thankful to be able to slow down, spend some time with family, and reflect on things and relationships that were important to them.

Resiliency. The final new theme that emerged was resiliency. What surprised the participants the most was how resilient they found out they were. A number of participants also commented on their ability to handle the current situation. One participant equated herself to a “warrior.” As Laura shared:

> I think one of the things that got me through it was just accepting the fact that like, I'm, I'm like a warrior. I'm a soldier of world war three. I'm telling myself like, like, I can do this . . . So I guess there's pride in that. I'm part of something bigger than myself, which is kind of cool. (Laura, personal communication, May 2020)

As Brenna declared: “I'm still here. It's not the end of the world” (Brenna, personal communication, May 2020). Isabelle and Maxwell reflected that they felt like they did the best they could, under the circumstances. Isabelle stated: “We made the best, best of what we could” (Isabelle, personal communication, May 2020) and Maxwell shared his perspective on his experience: “I would say it's more like a flat thing, not necessarily a lot better, or a lot worse. It's just kind of happened and sad to go with the flow. And I accepted it” (Maxwell, personal communication, May 2020). Kate replied that she was surprised at how well she was doing. “I

think just how okay with I am in this situation has been the most surprising for me" (Kate, personal communication, May 2020).

Even though students struggled with loss in a lot of different areas, one area they did not lose was hope. Participants mentioned time periods that were difficult. But even while mentioning difficulties, students named reasons for hope. Many reasons included the idea of less restrictions and areas opening up again, the plans to move back to Citytown in a few short weeks, options of internships and jobs, and future plans to visit with friends, and the hope of returning to in-person classes in the fall.

Students continued their development progress and their learning even while were away from campus. Many shared that they had time to reflect and to think about what they were grateful for. As Thomas shared during one of the focus group meetings:

> I feel like it's just a testament to how ABC has done already that we felt that loss. One of the things that makes ABC unique is the community development and how that is emphasized on campus and through the campus culture. (Thomas, personal communication, May 2020)

As emerging young adults, personal growth is reported to be one of the main factors of satisfaction with their college experience (Arnett, 2015). If personal growth is the criteria with which to measure ABC students time away from campus, there are satisfied with their college experience this past semester. As Luke summed up: "Obviously, like I wouldn't say, hey, "let's do it all again". I guess. I don't think it's maybe any worse of a person. I feel like it might have made me a bit of a better person" (Luke, personal communication, May 2020).

Connections to Literature

Change theory. My review of the existing literature regarding student development and change brought me to Schlossberg's Transition Theory. Schlossberg articulated that change occurs in everyone's life, both anticipated and unanticipated change (Anderson et al., 2011). Transition theory states that how one handles that change is dependent on four factors: the situation, the self, the support, and the strategies. Transition theory goes on to explain the 4 S model further by adding questions for each category:

Table 5

4 S Model Questions

Title	Question	Sub-questions
Situation	What is happening?	What is the trigger? What is the timing? Who has control? What roles are changing? What is the duration? Are there concurrent stressors?
Self	To whom is this happening?	Personal characteristics Perspective Are others impacted as well?
Supports	What help is available?	What resources are accessible? Are there barriers to resources/access?
Strategies	What is used to cope?	What coping strategies have been used before?

(Anderson et al., 2011).

For this study, each participant had undergone virtually the exact same situation that was the impetus for the change. However, as the comments of the participants demonstrate, their reactions to the situation vary from deep grief to nonchalance to contentment to irritation.

Transition theory states that there are three stages of change, moving into the change, moving through change, and moving out of change (Anderson et al., 2011). Moving in indicates the taking on of new roles, assumptions, routines, relationships and/or skills

(Anderson et al., 2011). Anderson et al. (2011) described the stage of moving through with more detail:

> Moving through a transition requires letting go of aspects of the self, letting go of former roles, and learning new roles. People moving through a transitions inevitably must take stock as they renegotiate these roles. Transitions often involve significant life events that require coping with what is perceived to be a crisis situation. Innate growth and potential may be realized through addressing and coping with these significant life events. (p. 30)

The third stage, moving out, is when people separate, end, leave, and move away from their former roles, assumptions, relationships, and/or routines.

Many of the participants in this project were hesitant if not downright resistant to the change of moving away from campus. Many students reported strong emotions including anger, frustration, and sadness at first. As students continued to reflect and as they spoke of adjusting to new roles, skills, and routines, many of them were able to articulate personal growth. Anderson et al. (2011) stated that "Each generation is subject to a combination of historical influences that influence their life's course" (p. 45). A number of participants shared how they were already thinking about how to tell the story to their kids and grandkids. As Kylie shared:

> I think about this a lot, actually, what it's going to be like to tell my kids about this, because by that time, they're going to you know they're going to be at a point where, you know, it's like, oh nothing like that could ever happen to us, but, you know, here we are, and we thought the same thing. (Kylie, personal communication, May 2020)

Many participants commented on how they felt COVID-19 will be a marking moment that will be written about in history books.

Thriving literature. Thriving literature measures well-being in three areas, psychological, academic, and social (Schreiner, 2010a; Schreiner, Louis, & Nelson, 2012). Participants in this study referred to their own psychological well-being often. There was a large range of responses regarding participants' assessment of their well-being in terms of a positive outlook. A number of students used phrases that indicated a deliberate choice to see the positives and used language that correlates with feelings of agency and self-determination, even in the midst of the unknown.

Academically, participants reported varied levels of engaged learning. Some participants continued to engage by asking good questions and extrapolating what they were learning in class to what was occurring globally. Others however found it difficult to stay engaged in the online learning format and many mentioned struggling with motivation. Several students also mentioned that they found it difficult to know how to ask questions during the online format and several participants also mentioned how much they missed being able to talk about academic concepts with friends and acquaintances outside of class in informal settings.

Socially, thriving measures how connected students feel. An interesting aspect of this research was learning how connected students still felt to their close friends. A few participants indicated that they felt even closer to their friends. Almost all of the students said they felt better when they talked with and connected with their friends and discussed how they were doing.

This study interviewed sophomore students exclusively. Thriving literature has determined that the sophomore year in college has its own unique academic and interpersonal challenges (Schreiner, Mullins, Pullins, & Seppelt, 2012b). Academically, students face

academic challenges because they are still primarily taking core level courses yet do not have as much interaction with faculty and they are often asked to declare a major (Schreiner et al., 2012b). Interpersonal relationships can present some challenges as well as many of the support mechanisms and programming that were pervasive during the first year are noticeably absent. Connection to campus community can account for up to 20% of the variable for thriving for sophomore students (Schreiner, et al. 2012b). As Schreiner et al. (2012b) described the change to "friendships of choice rather than convenience" (p. 114), which for some students is a difficult hurdle to navigate. This study adds to the literature that examines how sophomore year has its own unique challenges, particularly in the time of a major disruptor.

Mental health and use of technology. In addition, some of the participants' comments aligned with ongoing research concerning mental well-being and use of technology. Isabelle's and Kylie's comments about lack of control regarding smartphone usage connects to a study completed by Hudson et al. (2012), which asked students to self-report their perceptions of cell phone use, specifically texting. Four focus groups of eight students each completed the qualitative study. Students were asked about their perception of how texting impacts five areas of their health (physical, emotional, social, mental, and spiritual). Participants in this study mentioned a number of physical detriments (e.g., lack of sleep, incidents while texting in transit) and felt that texting offered them both positive and negatives in regard to emotional, social, and mental health.

As early as a study from 2012, individuals reflected that their smartphone use did not concern them (Oulasvitra et al., 2012). However, further Pew Research indicates that smartphone dependency and addiction is becoming an increasing concern for individuals themselves: "In a survey conducted in 2014, 64% of American adults reported that they owned

a smartphone, and 46% of the owners highlighted that their smartphone was something that 'they could not live without' (Darcin et al., 2016, p. 520). Even as a self-report, the level of dependence on smartphones is an increasing concern as smartphone use is closely connected to mental health (Elhai et al, 2018a; Elhai et al., 2018c; Kumcagiz, & Gunduz, 2016: Rozgonjuk & Elhai, 2019a; van Duesren et al., 2015). Within the last few years, researchers have also been paying particular attention to how excessive smartphone use may be impacting mental health: smartphones, loneliness, and social anxiety (Darcin et al., 2016), smartphone use and depression (Boumosleh & Jaalouk, 2017; Elhai et al., 2018a; Elhai et al., 2018c), smartphone use and anxiety (Elhai, Dvorak, Levine, & Hall, 2017a; Elhai, Dvorak, Levine, & Hall, 2017b; Rozgonjuk et al., 2018), and smartphone use and post-traumatic disorder (Contractor, Frankfurt, Weiss, & Elhai, 2017).

As several participants commented on the benefits of technology during this study, studies have also shown that use of the technology can be used to benefit mental health (Hoffner & Lee, 2015; Park & Lee, 2012). Hoffner and Lee (2015) conducted a survey of 287 undergraduate students to explore the role of a mobile phone in regulating emotion. Hoffner and Lee (2015) found that if the mobile phone is used for social support, the technology can have a very positive impact as it can lead to effective remediation of negative emotions. The mobile phone was also found to be useful for distraction, or attention deployment, however, social support through use of the phone was deemed to be the most important for reappraisal (Hoffner & Lee, 2015). This study contributes to the discussion of smartphones and emotion regulation by demonstrating that mobile phones can in fact be used to enhance well-being by assisting others to regulate their emotions through reappraisal. Globally, researchers are finding evidence of the positive impact of smartphone use as well. Park and Lee (2012) found

positive correlations with smartphone use and psychological well-being when surveying 279 Korean university students. The study suggests that the use of a mobile phone improved social connection and support networks which promoted psychological well-being.

Conclusion

Even as administrators, faculty, and staff continue to learn about the impact of remote learning, students in the study also demonstrated that they are continuing to learn. Participants showed a deep level of reflection not just about themselves but of the world around them and the context in which they find themselves. As participants contemplated their responses, they shared themes of self-discovery. Participant responses showed a depth of insight as they held both loss and gratitude, fragility and strength, and deeper insights held with greater uncertainty in tension. Participants also offered some helpful advice and considerations for higher education administration to consider moving forward. The next chapter, Chapter 5, discusses my own reflections as well as offers recommendations based on this research project.

Chapter 5: Reflections, Observations, and Recommendations

"*It's not just academics that are different, it is your entire life that is different"*

(Luke, personal communication, May 2020)

Chapter 5 offers a summary of my personal reflections and examines where my biases were confirmed and where they were not confirmed. Using the Thriving research framework, this chapter also offers some recommendations for ABC University which may be applicable more broadly to higher education personnel when considering student needs in light of major disruptors such as moving away from campus due to COVID-19.

Personal Reflections

Until this point, the project has outlined how students saw themselves change and the growth they observed through this experience. In this section, I have added my own personal reflections as well as discuss how my biases were confirmed or not confirmed.

As a professional live in staff member, I experienced significant changes to my work expectations, my relational connections with students, my daily routines, and some of the macro rhythms of the academic year. I felt sad because I knew what students would miss out on and I typically find a deep joy in walking alongside them through the milestone markers at the end of an ordinary school year. I also felt severely restricted in my ability to connect meaningfully with students because student needs shifted to logistical concerns related to moving out and because of physical distancing safety measures. This change in the relational aspects of my job required a different skill set than I usually rely on and involved a lot of waiting for decisions to be made by institutional and government authorities that did not always understand the complexities of residence life. Additionally, I felt a heightened sense of responsibility for student safety, particularly for those who had uncertain housing and travel arrangements and for those who were already facing elevated mental health concerns.

I found that my role during the crisis focused on being present and available to students in the midst of great uncertainty. After receiving the first two emails from the administration at ABC University regarding the move to online course work and then the closing of on campus residences, I spent time with both of the student staff teams I supervised trying to answer questions that I did not have answers to. When possible, I assisted students in processing the logistics of moving home and the intangible emotions connected with the sudden disruption of their academic work, residence life roles, and on campus support networks. Although a few

students left immediately after the first email, most of them left shortly after the administration closed the on-campus residences. However, due to a variety of personal factors, approximately thirty students remained on campus under my direct supervision for the duration of the academic year. The student staff members (resident assistants) allowed to move home as well, which meant that my investment in their leadership development and personal well being shifted to mediated connections via texting, video calls, and emails.

Usually, when students are present in the lobby, my natural inclination is to engage them in conversation. During the time of the pandemic, the respectful response was to give each student as wide a berth as possible, especially because we were still learning how the disease spread. Avoiding students, losing face to face contact with them, and to losing the ability to eat with them cut to the very core of how I have normally facilitated community with students. Thankfully, I was still able to virtually meet with my RA staff for the next six weeks and I met virtually with a few students who had been struggling, but the experience was not the same. As the academic year wrapped up, I found myself grieving the loss of celebratory milestones, such as dorm banquets, end of the year retreats, and graduation. Even more, I felt the lack of closure with the current year student leaders and of welcoming the new leaders who will serve in student leadership roles for the coming academic year. I had to work through my own feelings of loss and disconnection from students as the focus of my work had completely shifted.

I also recognize that I was impacted by the general atmosphere shift around ABC University during this time. I experienced a great deal of sadness and frustration as health safety restrictions eliminated shared meal times, opportunities to socialize in dorm lobbies and other common spaces, and the typical expressions of affection and community through

handshakes, high fives, and other appropriate physical affirmation. In a residential setting that values social development, proximity, and appropriate physical interactions, the contrast brought about through the restrictions was disconcerting. Being able to connect with students through this project, though it was mediated, gave me reassurance and encouragement regarding their ability to navigate such unexpected circumstances.

These feelings and experiences of the COVID-19 related closure of campus contributed to my desire to conduct the research at the institution where I am employed. I wondered if there were ways we could have navigated the transitions in ways that were healthier for those living in campus residences. I wanted to learn as much as I could about how this abrupt experience impacted student mental health and support systems. My hope was that through this research, ABC University would be better prepared to respond to future crises with a better understanding of the student experience and their needs, particularly their emotional support needs.

I am aware that completing your own "backyard" research (Creswell, 2009, p. 177) can be complicated due to the fact that there may be conflict of interest and power dynamics which effect the ability to interpret and report the data (Coghlan, 2007; Creswell, 2009). Conducting research at your own institution can be difficult for several reasons and I found that be to true. Two of the most difficult issues I had were difficulty not responding with solution focused responses and difficulty not responding to emotional sharing. As someone with social work training, I have been trained to listen well but I have also been trained to ask questions such that they lead to goal formulation. During the research project, there were a number of times when I wanted to ask further questions about a particular aspect of what a participant was sharing with me, but I realized it was a more of a goal formation question than an exploratory

question. Exploratory questions are a large part of solution focused listening, so although the training was by and large helpful, I did find myself having to bracket several intuitive responses. For example, one participant shared how they had been affected as a result of a tragedy. I had prior knowledge about that tragedy and felt torn about how to respond. The social work training I received lead me to want to respond by using active listening skills such as empathizing, normalizing, and exploring more about this participant's well-being in relation to processing the tragedy, but I found myself bracketing those responses. I chose instead to listen without asking any further exploratory questions and stayed mostly to the questions I had asked other participants. After Rubin and Rubin (2012) and watching Flipp's interviewing tutorials, I included questions such as the "grand tour" and "the probe" (Flipp, 2014b), which assisted with the process.

Another issue that was extremely difficult for me was bracketing my response to hearing about student's emotional pain as a result of the pandemic. Thankfully, the agreement with the IRB stated that I could ask about student's mental well-being, offer them resources as needed, and share with ABC university staff if necessary. Participants were made aware that anything they shared with me related to self-harm (including suicidal ideation or intent) or intent to harm others would not be subject to confidentiality. Although participants did not indicate suicidality, several them still talked about the emotional struggle they had had over the past few months. It took a lot of work to stay engaged in the research line of questioning rather than asking more in-depth questions about their mental well-being.

Assumptions that were affirmed. One of my presuppositions before engaging in this project was the idea that student's well-being is better served by employing reappraisal rather than suppression to regulate emotions. I noticed that for the participants who indicated they

were having a difficult time in regard to mental well-being, it often coincided with a time when they stopped talking to friends or when they had not communicated with friends very much at all during the time away from campus. Those participants who reported doing well with mental well-being talked about strong connections with friends with whom they connected with regularly. Specifically, one student mentioned that she was not doing well at all until she decided to open up to her friends and talk about what was bothering her.

It is my belief that although I see a purpose for communication through technology, mental health is better when people communicate in person. This bias was both confirmed and contradicted as students reported that even during time away from campus and only communicating with friends via technology, their friendships strengthened and most of them were doing quite well in regard to their mental well-being. This research showed that while they prefer in-person communication, communication can still thrive through technology. As Frank states: “I'm very ready to be back in-person with people and stop the social distancing” (Frank, personal communication, May 2020) and Kate shares: “For me, just being in-person makes me feel so much more connected to someone” (Kate, personal communication, May 2020). Eric adds what he thinks are sentiments for most of the people who have experienced moving away from campus: “I don't think anyone prefers the way things are now” (Eric, personal communication, May 2020). However, Maxwell and Hannah specifically mentioned how pleased they were that they were able to maintain their friendships using technology.

At the same time, a number of participants commented that although their relationships were doing well, they preferred in-person communications. Frank noticed that online communication is not as rich as face to face communication: “When you're not next to each other, there's not like a . . . you're missing some things because you're definitely missing the

physical body language stuff" (Frank, personal communication, May 2020). Hannah added that: "I think that's part of the college experience is just having so many lives that you touch in a small way each day" (Hannah, personal communication, May 2020). Kate shared:

> But it's been hard with quarantine not being able to see them and try and continue to become friends and get closer, because there are things that you can talk about online. It's been hard with quarantine not being able to see them and try and continue to become friends and get closer, because there are things that you can talk about online. (Kate, personal communication, May 2020)

One of the themes that emerged from this research was students' realization of how important physical proximity with each other was to them.

Even though Maxwell felt like his relationships were going well online, he indicated he missed the in-person communication as well: "I think I'm definitely going to, when things settle down even more, appreciate face to face social interactions more" (Maxwell, personal communication, May 2020). Grace takes the idea of missing in-person communication one step further by stressing the importance of community: "I think it like helped me recognize, like the importance of community and like having like social interactions and like face to face communications and like how easy it is for people to like get lost when they're like by themselves" (Grace, personal communication, May 2020). Annie also shared that she preferred the in-person connection: "I have a lot of friends that I can reach out to, but it's not the same as being able to see people and that's definitely hard . . . . I think it's made me realize how important my friendships and relationships are" (Annie, personal communication, May 2020).

New learning. I held several assumptions before research began which were not affirmed by the research. Although I did not ask any questions about faith directly, I assumed that a high

percentage of students would reference their faith as an important aspect of thriving. I interviewed students who attended a faith-based university where faith development is part of its core identity as well as states as faith development being one of the five learning outcomes of residence life. Thriving research has indicated that faith is an important element for students in higher education (Derrico, Tharp, & Schreiener, 2015) particularly during the sophomore year (Schreiner et al., 2012b) and for students of color (McIntosh, 2015; Schreiner, 2014) but this current research study found different results. I was surprised to hear a minimal number of students reference their faith.

For this particular study, only two students wove faith into the majority of their answers, one of whom shared that one of the main things she missed about the ABC community was the communal practicing of faith. Two other students mentioned prayer as being a helpful coping strategy for them. A fifth student discussed how they feel God has provided for them during this time away from campus. The sixth student's only reference to faith or God was a mention that they were not sure whether or not God had a reason for what was happening and the seventh student mentioned "God only knows" in response to the question of what will happen in the future. The remaining nine participants did not make any mention of their faith or faith practices.

When asked to think about how they make meaning of COVID-19, there was an interesting juxtaposition of perspectives regarding where the participants focused their interest. Some students moved to thinking globally. Maxwell and Frank talked about how they saw a global picture of humanity coming together. Frank shared his fascination with how the world was responding: "I've always been more interested in what it's causing because humanity as a whole has come together to do to fix something rather than being like separate organizations" (Frank, personal communication, May 2020) and Maxwell focused on a similar theme of global

solidarity: “This is the war against a disease, it's not humanity against humanity, which I think is kind of inspirational to an extent. It almost seems to me like a wakeup call to humanity like we got to work together” (Maxwell, personal communication, May 2020).

Several students also expressed empathy for other people as part of their experience of COVID-19. As Thomas reflected: “[I’m] heartbroken over like everyone whose lives have been disrupted by this either by like adjusting or having to go online, or losing their jobs, or even just like having the coronavirus itself, like it's incredible how much this has impacted everyone” (Thomas, personal communication, May 2020). Annie and Melanie highlighted the need to think about justice during this time. As Annie shared: “I think that the crisis has highlighted a lot of inequities and inequalities just in our world. And it makes it a crucial time to be advocating for my friends and neighbors and brothers and sisters who are suffering because of it much more than I am” (Annie, personal communication, May 2020). Melanie expands on this idea by expressing her interest in how the pandemic is impacting others: “In some ways the pandemic affects everyone. And in other ways there's a lot of inequality of who is affected . . . And also, I feel like there's a lot of unity that comes out of it with like being kind of in this together” (Melanie, personal communication, May 2020).

Another theme to the question of meaning making was for participants to reflect inward. A few students mentioned that this time clarified for them what was really important such as spending time with family and friends. At times, the inward emphasis reflected a perspective which seemed to focus on the individual themselves, even to the extent that the global pandemic was perceived as a personal lesson. When one participant was asked how they make meaning of their experience, they shared: “Sort of feels like I was supposed to learn some things that I didn't

the first time, or something like that . . . I am just not meant to have a normal life" (participant, personal communication, May 2020).

Understandably, several students were not sure exactly how to make meaning of their whole experience yet. As Isabelle stated: "I mean it's just, nothing that any of us have really ever experienced before is this kind of a situation so I think all of us are a little bit lost of what exactly to make out of it" (Isabelle, personal communication, May 2020).

Assumptions participants had about me. During the research process, I also noticed that at times, the interviewees made assumptions about me. In the email that was sent to invite people to participate in the research project. I self-identified as an ABC university staff member who works in residence life. During the interviews, a number of participants took for granted that I understand all of the acronyms that are associated with ABC University and residence hall living. A number of times, I asked the participants to explain the acronyms or the concept (such as a living learning community) so I could hear their experience and understanding in their own words, rather than use my own experience or interpretation of the concept.

Recommendations

Based on the shared experiences of the participants, I have used Thriving research as a framework for the recommendations for ABC University. Other institutions of higher education may also find benefit from these recommendations recognizing they may need to be contextualized based on size, location, staffing structure, student composition, and programmatic emphasis. Bland et al. (2012) suggested that those who support emerging young adults need to be prepared to offer helpful strategies to allow them to cope with the pressures and emotions they need to manage, as well as give them tools to be able to lower their stress levels.

Recommendations are based on student's need for a psychological sense of belonging to a community, need for access to academic support and resources, and a need for social connections (Schreiner, 2010a; Schreiner, Louis, & Nelson, 2012a). The recommendations offered here are particularly necessary in response to the major disruptor of moving away from campus due to COVID-19. Specifically, the following recommendations address students' psychological need for belonging, address increased mental health needs of students, address increased needs for social support networks, and outline opportunities for decreasing academic stress.

Recommendation 1: Address students' psychological need for belonging by revisiting messaging received in March 2020. Many students commented on feeling "kicked out" and not feeling like they were wanted on campus, which can have negative effects on the feeling of belonging. This experience increased their distress levels, particularly with regard to their sense of belonging to the ABC community. Although students agreed that the university's decisions made sense in the circumstances, the students' relationships with ABC University was damaged. Revisiting the school's messaging and how that impacted student affect, their sense of belonging, and their levels of distress in the crisis would help restore the school-student relationship, improve student satisfaction, and contribute to greater student retention.

Recommended action 1: Send an email to the on-campus student body of 2019-2020. The email should acknowledge the unintended effect of many students feeling evicted from one of their significant communities during a time of crisis. This email needs to apologize for harm that students experienced in closing campus, even though that harm was unintended. The email also ought to include recognition that trauma related effects from COVID-19 may persist, key indicators for how to recognize signs of trauma, and a list of accessible resources for students

who are experiencing disequilibrium or trauma-related symptoms. The responsibility for implementing this recommendation rests with ABC's administration, and particularly with the residence life leadership team in consultation with the counselling services staff.

Recommendation 2: Respond to increased mental health needs of students with a special emphasis on responding to trauma. Regardless of the form of education, whether in-person, remote, or a hybrid of the two, ABC University needs to respond to the tremendous emotional shift students have experienced since March 2020. The COVID-19 global pandemic exposed the whole student body to a traumatic event, which is defined by "a circumstance that may include the actual or extreme threat of physical or psychological harm" (SAMHSA, 2014, p. 8). One student in this study even reported some behaviors that sound similar to someone experiencing acute stress disorder. She shared:

> I had weird things happen to me emotionally that I haven't really experienced ever before. I don't even know there was one point where my brother and I were like arguing, not arguing, we were like, playing with a glass of milk at the dinner table and he's like, no, it's not yours and I'm like, I dropped the milk. And then I just got so upset with myself because I was like, I just dropped the glasses in my hands. And then, a couple weeks ago, I just had a point where like, something superduper funny, and then all of a sudden, it was just superduper not and I just started to cry. And then I was laughing again. It was a really weird thing. (participant, personal communication, May 2020)

As such, ABC University needs to prepare for an increase in symptoms related to trauma and stressor related disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Although not all students will experience COVID-19 as a trauma disorder, ABC University needs to recognize that COVID-19 has altered many students' social and mental

states. For example, several participants in this study reported that they seldom left their houses during the ten-week period from the campus shut down until their interviews for this research project. They were not used to being around people anymore. This reported increased strain on student mental health reflects the impact COVID-19 has had on mental health of 18 to 24-year-olds throughout the U.S. In a recent CDC survey, Czeisler et al. (2020) found that almost 75% of the 18 to 24-year-olds surveyed had experienced one or more significant symptoms of a mental health crisis in the last 30 days.

Before tools and strategies can be offered to the student body, ABC University first needs to recognize the losses and changes students have experienced in connection with COVID-19, which extend beyond their direct engagement with the school (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). As one participant stated: “It’s not just academics that are different, it is your entire life that is different” (participant, personal communication, May 2020). One participant noted that only one of their professors even recognized that a significant transition had occurred; other faculty carried on as normal with minimal adjustments to an online format (participant, personal communication, May 2020).

Students also need recognition that they are worn out. Everyone is fatigued; staff and faculty will need to respond accordingly. As one participant stated: “I think it's still gonna be, honestly, a solid year until you can really get back to totally normal and so I think just keeping in mind that we're all, we're all exhausted” (Isabelle, personal communication, May 2020). Students need the school to recognize that the whole COVID-19 experience has, in many cases, changed them. The ABC University should engage the following three recommended actions in order to prepare for the emotional toll that the COVID-19 experience, including the transition to a much smaller and more limited relational context, has taken on students.

Recommended Action 2A: Increase student awareness of mental health assistance options, including offering trauma and stressor related workshops. ABC university has an active counselling center that provides a number of resources. In light of the ways students have experienced COVID-19, counselling services should work in conjunction with residence life professional staff to offer workshops focusing on coping with trauma frequently during this academic year. Additionally, because social support increases resilience to trauma, (Sippel, Pietrzak, Charney, Mayes, & Southwick, 2015), residence life staff can utilize existing social networks in the residences to facilitate small support groups where students are empowered to share their experiences of COVID. This approach will help students to engage reappraisal strategies, such as debriefing experiences with peers, that are known to alleviate effects of trauma (SAMHSA, 2014). Groups should be divided between students who lived in residences last year and students who are new to the residence as the two groups will have markedly different experiences. Based on the ratio of Resident Assistants (RA) to students on their floor, counselling services staff could train RAs to serve as group facilitators. Counselling services could also train their peer listeners to facilitate groups specifically dedicated to helping others debrief trauma for commuting students and offer the groups on campus. In addition, RAs and Residence Life Professional Staff should be trained as to how to recognize signs of trauma.

Furthermore, ABC University needs to increase visibility and accessibility of counselling services. At a minimum, this step means increasing email and poster communication, as well as raising the physical visibility of mental health support staff around campus. As part of this increased presence, staff from the counselling center, campus ministries, student success, and residence life could set up tables in high traffic areas, including dorm lobbies, common

footpaths, and near dining hall entrances and exits to raise awareness and accessibility to their services.

With the current limits of practicing physical distancing, including potential quarantines, residence life staff will need to leverage technology to connect with students and create a sense of community when physical proximity may not be possible (Saltzman, Hantzel, & Bordnick, 2020). Weekly emails with updates, encouragements, and communal language regarding shared experiences are recommended. Together, these steps can increase awareness regarding how students can access mental health supports, while also reducing the stigma often associated with mental health challenges. The responsibility for implementing this recommendation rests with the school counselling services and residence life leadership team.

Recommended Action 2B: Mandate Mental Health First Aid training for Student Life Staff. As Resident Assistants and Professional live in staff see students in the informal spaces outside of classrooms, they are often in frontline response spaces where they can notice signs of distress or mental illness. In addition, many student life staff encounter students when they need urgent help related to emotional well-being. Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is a course designed to create awareness to recognize initial signs and symptoms of mental illness, to allow trainees to offer initial support, and to reduce stigma of accessing mental health support (MHFA, 2020b). Mental Health First Aid for Adults working with Youth is an evidenced-based course which covers topics such as mood disorders, substance use disorders, eating disorders, psychotic disorders, and deliberate self-injury (MHFA, 2020a). This particular course also includes learning how to respond to anxiety and trauma related disorders, which would allow space in the training to talk about trauma and acute stress disorder. MHFA has been shown to improve "knowledge, sensitivity, and confidence" for staff who have participated in the training (Massey,

Brooks, & Burrow, 2014, p. 335). The course could also be offered to professors and community members. I taught Mental Health First Aid and Mental Health First Aid for Adults who Interact with Youth in Canada up until June 2019. If necessary, this course could be offered to staff virtually. The responsibility for implementing this recommendation rests with the school counselling services and residence life leadership team.

Recommended action 2C: Teach coping skills to both faculty and students. I recommend that ABC University offer various ways for both faculty and students to learn coping skills. Because ABC University plans to hold onsite classes this fall, faculty will be some of the few professionals that students will interact with in person. Therefore, workshops and seminars centering on coping skills and symptom identification should be required as professional development for all faculty. Coping skills could be delivered by faculty as part of the first-year seminar course. Essentially, faculty are a form of first responders in relationship to students' ability or inability to manage a healthy response to stress.

Additionally, ABC University should assist students with coping skill acquisition through efforts such as peer support groups, brief videos linked through social media, and both in-person and online therapy options. Using coping skills is one of the necessary components for successful transitions during major disruptions (Anderson et al., 2011); as such, ABC University will need to focus additional attention toward normalizing strong experiences of emotions connected to COVID-19. Based on participants' comments, a number of them did not fully know how to process what was happening to them and they felt alone. The responsibility for implementing this recommendation rests with the first-year seminar faculty, school counselling services, and residence life leadership team.

Recommendation 3: Create and utilize existing social support structures. A number of students mentioned feeling lonely and disconnected from others, including their peers. A strong sense of social support is critical as a protective factor of lowering the risk of developing anxiety or depression (Buote, 2007; Watkins & Hill, 2016). Thoits (2011) highlighed social support includes a sense of belonging and mattering. Belonging, or membership, indicates acceptance into a group (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Thoits, 2011). Feeling the sense of belonging and acceptance is a vital part of social baseline theory, which posits belonging to a group provides the ability to regulate emotions through load sharing and increase one's sense of security through risk distribution. Mattering (Thoits, 2011) is the concept that one's membership in a group provides a sense of value and worth. Thoits (2011) stated that mattering is a protective factor against despair: "knowing who we are to others also provides *purpose and meaning in life*, which in turn guard against anxiety and existential despair" (p. 148).

Recommended action 3A: Create small group connections. If on campus, residence life staff will need to implement creative ways of connecting with students amidst the possibility of physical distancing limitations. Even if big events such as building wide retreats and banquets are not possible due to COVID-19 restrictions, relationships can still be formed by initiating 1:1 conversations and small group gatherings. Residence life staff should create opportunities for small groups to connect such as small group gatherings and weekly check in meetings with individuals. If possible, outdoor venues may allow for larger groups to gather. The responsibility for implementing this recommendation rests with the residence life staff, student activities staff, and campus involvement staff.

Recommended action 3B: If learning moves to remote access only, continue to employ RAs virtually. If learning needs to move online and residences are vacated again, ABC

University would benefit from having the RAs continue to connect with their students virtually. Virtual connection still allows for a relationship to be maintained. As evidenced by comments from participants, mediated technology can work to maintain a relationship if it is already established. RAs should be encouraged to hold weekly virtual drop-in sessions for their floors, send regular emails, and check in virtually with each floor member on a consistent basis. The responsibility for implementing this recommendation rests with the residence life staff.

Recommended action 3C: Enlist help from volunteer student leaders to maintain relationships. Residence halls at ABC University typically have students who are volunteer leaders in areas of social gatherings, spiritual growth, and service opportunities. If learning moves to remote access only, residence life staff should encourage student leaders to continue connecting virtually with students in their building and on their floor. Student leaders can offer to host weekly Bible studies, trivia nights, and watch parties. The responsibility for implementing this recommendation rests with the residence life staff and campus involvement staff.

Recommendation 4: Respond to student concerns about academic stress. A high number of students discussed how the disorganization of academics led to feelings of higher stress. COVID-19 ushered most of higher education into a landscape that was already changing. Innovation and adaptability are necessary in order for higher education institutions to be viable and relevant in the future (Davidson, 2017; Dumestre, 2016; Selingo, 2013).

Recommended action 4A: Have clear academic expectations. Use one central place to list assignments. Students were very generous in their descriptions of how professors had to adjust to moving online with just as little warning as students had. However, a number of students did comment that professors using multiple digital platforms was confusing. A few students mentioned how they overlooked something because their assignments were posted in

several different places, but not always in all of the online places. The responsibility for implementing this recommendation rests with provost's office, faculty, student success and academic counsellors and information technology staff.

Recommended action 4B: Teach students online engagement skills. In the event classes need to move online again, students would benefit from having sessions related to how to stay engaged with online learning, and with online etiquette regarding asking questions and interrupting the professor, etc. Many students in this study reported difficulty engaging in class material due to lack of online engagement skills. The responsibility for implementing this recommendation rests with provost's office, faculty, student success and academic counsellors and information technology staff.

Recommended action 4C: Create a remote student learning support center. To accommodate the needs of online students, I recommend that ABC University create a Remote Learning Support Center (RLSC). This center will focus on providing three things: 24-hour tech support for online students, a student services hub which includes academic and social support, and resources for assisting faculty with both the technical and pedagogical implications of teaching online. The primary objectives would be to increase online student retention, increase online student satisfaction rates, and to increase faculty job satisfaction rates. The Remote Learning Support Center will support students with their technical issues beyond regular work hours as well as give them greater access to student services such as academic assistance, advising, counselling, and peer and staff support. The responsibility for implementing this recommendation rests with provost's office, faculty, student success and academic counsellors and information technology staff.

Limitations

This research was limited to a particular sample of students at a particular university in the Midwest United States and, therefore, generalizability may be difficult (Orcher, 2005). All the participants who were interviewed were in their sophomore year of school. One of the limitations of this study was the exclusion of certain demographic data. As such, data could not be gathered regarding gender trends. Ethnicity was also not asked so no data can be gathered regarding patterns shared by particular ethnic groups.

Participants who self-selected. The recruitment process lent itself to a partial process of self-selection. By virtue of their own answers, students who participated in this study tended to be students who were heavily involved on campus and mostly extraverted. As participant comments demonstrated, most of them had gone through an adjustment period and now report they are doing well regarding mental well-being. It is possible that students who are not faring so well opted out of the study due to a number of reasons including their current struggle with mental health related issues. A study by Kraut et al. (2002) explored the idea that the traits of extraversion and social support are two variables that might influence internet use and sense of well-being. The study found that extraverted individuals who used the internet heavily were more likely to be involved in their community. Those participants who were extraverted and had a strong sense of social support were not negatively impacted by internet use. Kraut el al. (2002) introduced a concept to describe the connection between motivation for use of the internet entitled the “rich get richer” model (p. 58). This concept describes the observed pattern of those who are extraverted and socially connected become more socially connected via use of the internet.

Lack of triangulation data. An additional limitation to the study was the lack of triangulation of data received from parents, siblings, other relatives, or friends who were living with the student at their place of residence. This project primarily focused on social support participants perceived they received from friends and did not spend as much time accounting for the social support participants received from family.

Future Research

This project focused on the lived experience of sophomore students, students who had a chance to develop relationships with people in residence over the past year and a half. Future research could include tracking this particular group of students longitudinally to assess mental well-being. Research could extend to interviewing students who were in the first year as first year students would not have had as long to establish core friendships. This would allow the research to draw comparisons about relationship patterns. Research could also include connecting with students who were seniors to continue to explore the theme of loss and grief.

A related research project could explore which method of emotion regulation expression (either face-to-face, texting on a smartphone, or journaling) correlates with lower stress, anxiety, and depression levels.

In addition, future research could also include interviewing students who stayed on campus including international students who were not able to go home and either had to remain on campus and/or find alternative places to live in a very short time to explore themes related to mental health and coping mechanisms. In addition, future research could include interviewing students from a large, public university who also lived in residence but had to move home in a very short amount of time to compare their experience of community with smaller institutions.

Because social support was a theme of this project, further research could be done regarding the impact of the familial support, rather than peer support, participants experienced. Interviews could be held regarding family support and data could be triangulated by interviewing families or people who shared the same household.

Conclusion

University students engage in developmental tasks such as managing emotions, develop interpersonal relationships, and develop competencies. Paired with adapting to new social surroundings, encountering new academic pressures, and experiencing additional responsibilities, adjustment to university can increase students' stress. The introduction of COVID-19 to North America and the subsequent decisions to close many campuses caused a major disruption to university students' social support network, academic learning, and mental health. Although they experienced loss and displacement, many students surprised themselves with how resilient they were through the experience of moving away from campus.

As students prepare for the fall semester, institutions of higher education need to be prepared to address social, emotional, and academic needs of students. Specifically, I recommend that ABC University attend to the emotional needs of students by addressing the impact of the March 2020 COVID-19 messaging to on-campus students, by creating greater awareness and visibility of mental health services, and by offering Mental Health First Aid courses to the ABC community, beginning with student life staff. ABC University can address students' social needs by utilizing the existing student support networks facilitated by residence life and campus involvement staff. In the event classes are transitioned to remote learning, Resident Assistants, Residence Life Professional Staff, and other volunteer student leaders should continue to create virtual opportunities for engagement. Finally, if ABC University pivots

to remote learning, academic stress could be relieved by providing academic supports by teaching online engagement skills, creating clear academic expectations, and initiating a remote student learning support center that would offer both academic and technical support.

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Appendix A - Individual Interview Protocol

Hello _____. Thank you for being willing to participate in this study. My name is Hennie Schoon and this study is part of my dissertation project for the Ed. D at Bethel University. The purpose of this study is to learn about your experience since you have moved away from campus. I have worked in different residence life programs over the past twenty years and I am very interested in hearing how students are adjusting to the recent change of moving home as a result of COVID-19. I'd like to review a few things before we get started.

First, I'd like to confirm that you are a sophomore at ABC University who was living in a residence and has since moved home. Is that correct?

Second, I'd like to remind you that participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are welcome to end the interview at any time without any negative consequences. All participants who complete the interview as well as the focus group will be sent a $25 Amazon gift certificate.

Third, I would like to remind you that this interview is being audio recorded. No one else will see or hear the audio recording other than myself. However, once information is transcribed, an external auditor may see the data as reported under pseudonyms. All information that you share will be reported under a pseudonym or as aggregate information. ABC University may also receive a copy of this project. Do you consent to being audio recorded?

Fourth, all information that you share with me will be kept confidential unless you share harm to self or harm to others. In the event you disclose harm to self or harm to others (including intent), that specific information will be share to the appropriate ABC personnel and/or police.

Fifth, while we talk, there may be a pause or two because I will be taking notes as we talk as well. Some pauses also may be experienced due to lag time of the video feed. There are no right or wrong answers – my goal is to listen to your experience.

Thank you again for your time to participate in this study. It is very appreciated. I anticipate the interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. Do you have any questions before we start? Are you ready to begin?

Ice Breaking Questions

1. Can you tell me about how you got to ABC University– your decision-making process?
2. You have lived in residence last year and this year – is that correct? Can you tell me some stories about your experience in residence life at ABC University?

Main Questions

3. **Tell me about receiving the email from President _____ on March 11 – the email saying that classes were moving online and encouraged students to move home if they could. What was you initial reaction once you read the email?**
4. What was your reaction to the idea of moving home?
5. Can you tell me a little bit about the living situation you moved into and who you live with? How would you describe your relationships with them?
6. What is life like for you at home right now? What was it like when you first moved home?
7. **If there was an emotion to describe how you are doing right now, what would it be?**
8. **On a scale from 1-10 how would you describe your mental well-being right now? How would you describe a __?** What number did you start out at? What is preventing

you from being an (one number lower)? What would it take to be a ___ (one number higher)?

Exploring Questions

9. **Has anything as home been difficult? If yes, how so?**
10. **Have there been good parts about moving home? If, yes, which parts and why?**
11. What is something that has surprised you since you have moved home?
12. **How have your relationships changed since you have been home?**
13. **How would you describe the quality of the friendships you have now compared to last semester?**
14. **How has your learning been impacted by the experience of moving all of your classes online**?

Broad Sweeping Questions

15. What are you learning about yourself?
16. How do you make meaning out of everything that has happened over the past two months since you moved away from campus?

Summary Question

17. Is there anything else that you would like me to know about your adjustment to home?

Thank you so much for your time. Your investment in this project is very appreciated and I do not take your time for granted. I'd like to contact you a later date just to clarify that I have captured what you have said and what you intended correctly. What would be the best way to contact you?

Also, I would like to invite you to a focus group which will take place on _____. The purpose of the focus group is for participants to discuss in a group setting what their experiences have been like. The focus group would also allow me to validate that I have understood themes of what you have discussed in your initial interview.

Thank you again, have a great day!

Appendix B - Protocol for Focus Group

Focus Group Invitation

Participants will be invited to the focus group immediately after the initial 1:1 interview has concluded. A follow up email will be sent to each participant both a week before and a day before the focus group meeting reminding them of the focus group time and link. The email is as follows:

Hello! Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this study. I really appreciated being able to meet with you and hear about your experience of moving home.
The next part of the study includes participants taking part in a focus group. A focus group would include students from ABC University I have already interviewed. The focus group would be facilitated by me as an opportunity for students to talk with each other about their experience as well as an opportunity for me to hear your collective answers.

As a reminder, the group will meet on _____ at _____ and the link is _____. Your participation in this group is voluntary. Depending on how many students decide to participate, I anticipate that the focus group will run 60-90 minutes. All students who participate in the focus group and have completed the individual interview will be sent a $25 Amazon gift card.

If you have any questions, please let me know.

Sincerely,

~Hennie Schoon

Focus Group Protocol

At the appointed time and date, the researcher will facilitate the focus group. The following is the protocol for facilitating the focus group.

Hello! It is good to see you all again. Thank you for taking the time to join our discussion today. As you know, my name is Hennie and I will be facilitating our group meeting. You have all been invited to participate because you were a sophomore at ABC and you have met with me for the 1:1 interview already.

The purpose of the focus group is to find out more about your experiences of having moved away from campus due to COVID-19. There are no right and no wrong answers – your experience is valid in and of itself so if you find you have had a different experience than others in the group, please feel free to voice your opinion.

Since we are on Teams, a few of us may end of speaking at a time, which I anticipate will happen more than once. This is fine and we will just check in with each other to see who would like to speak first.

Before we begin, I would like to share a few ground rules. To help clarify the discussion process, I will be addressing you by your first name. It is possible some of you already know people here in the group so as a reminder, please keep the identities of everyone in the group confidential.

Finally, the conversation will be recorded and transcribed using otter.ai. In later reports, no personal identifiers will be connected to your comments. I'd like to go around the room and confirm that everyone is comfortable being audio-recorded.

(Go around the room). I anticipate we will spend about an hour to an hour and a half discussing our topic for today. Let's begin. Let's start by having everyone introduce themselves by sharing your first name and whether you are currently living at home or if you are living off-campus in a house with friends. So and so, would you be willing to start?

Questions:

1. As I have reflected on some of the comments you have made to me during our previous interviews, a number of themes have emerged. One theme was the idea that this time away from campus helped to clarify what was important for you. Can you share with us what either became important to you or what remained important to you?
2. Let's talk about time. What happened to the concept of time during the last 10 weeks?
3. Another theme was how different weeks or months seemed to take on a different tone, meaning some were more difficult than others. Think back a little bit as I would like to talk about three different months, March, April, and May. Would someone be willing to pick on of those months (March, April, or May) and share what that month was like for them?
4. Another theme that emerged was coping skills. What coping skills do you think you used and which ones were the most effective?
5. Another theme was technology. Can you talk a little bit about your use of technology during this time?
6. We also talked a little bit about what you might be learning about yourself and the world around you. How do you think you have changed as a result of your experiences with moving away from campus as a result of COVID-19?
7. How does your major or area of study influence how your view of what is happening?
8. From a student's perspective, what would you say to ABC as a community as it looks toward moving forward?
9. Have we missed talking about anything that you had hoped to discuss or share?

Appendix C - Request for Permission to Send Email to Students in Residence at ABC University

Dear Vice President of Student Life and Dean of Students:

I am emailing to request permission to conduct my dissertation research at ABC University. I am very interested in learning about the lived experiences of students who lived in residence and now due to COVID-19 have moved home. Specifically, I am interested to learn about how moving home and classes going online has impacted students' academic and social well-being.

I am requesting permission to be able to email sophomore students, who lived in a residence last year and this year up until March, and who have since moved back to their parent's home. Sophomores who lived on campus would be able to reflect on their full year on campus last year and compare that experience to this year. Listed below is the eligibility of participants:

- Current second-year student at ABC University
- Lived in residence (dormitory) this current academic year (up until March 2020)
- Lived in residence (dormitory) this past academic year (2019-2020)
- Not a student who lived in ____ or _____ residence hall (the two residences I oversee) during the 2019-2020 school year or a student will is planning on living in _____ or _____ during 2020-2021.
- Not a student who has been offered a student leader role for 2020-2021.

This project will not proceed unless it has received approval from the institutional review boards at both Bethel University and ABC University.

A copy of the completed project will be provided to you with the hopes that the data may be helpful the Student Life division and particularly, to the Residence Life department at ABC University.

If you have any questions or need any further information, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Sincerely,

~Hennie Schoon

Appendix D - Email to Eligible Student Participants

Hello! My name is Hennie Schoon and I am a current doctoral student at Bethel University. I am working on a dissertation which will explore how students are adapting to moving home after living in a residence due to COVID-19.

You are receiving this email because as a sophomore student who lived in a residence at ABC University for the past two years and have since moved home, you may be eligible for this study.

My hope is to spend approximately 45-60 minutes with each participant interviewing them using the Microsoft Teams platform. Participants are also invited to take part in a focus group which will be held a few weeks after the 1:1 interviews. I am currently employed at ABC University in the residence life program so we can easily use the same Teams platform. I have worked in residence life programs for the past 20 years and am very interested in hearing how students are experiencing all of the recent changes. I am not looking for any particular answers and I view you as the expert of your own experience.

Every student who completes the interview and the focus group will be sent a $25 Amazon gift card. This project has been approved by the Institutional Review Boards of Bethel University and ABC University and this email has been sent with permission from ABC University's Residence Life department.

If you are interested in participating, please let me know via this email. Once I have received your email, I can send you a consent form that includes a little bit more information and then we can set up a time for the interview. I imagine this is a busy season for you so we can definitely work around your schedule and set up a time that works best for you.

If you have any questions, please let me know! Sincerely, ~Hennie Schoon

Appendix E - Follow up email to Participants

Dear,

Thank you for your interest in this study!

There are a few interview times that are still available (listed below). The interview time slots will be filled based by those whose consent forms are received first.

In order to move forward with the study, two things are needed:

1) I need to receive a signed consent form from you (more details below)

2) Let me know what day/time work best for you (more details below)

1) **Consent form**: In order to participate in the study, you will need to read, sign, scan, and email me the attached consent and confidentiality form. If you have any questions about the form, please don't hesitate to let me know.

2) **Interview times:** I hope to begin the interviews next week. The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes. I have listed the available time slots below. Slots will be confirmed with participants on a first to respond via email basis.

If none of the times listed work for you, feel free to let me know and we can try to arrange a different time. All times listed are Eastern Standard Time (ABC's time zone).

Thank you again for your interest!

Sincerely,

~Hennie

Appendix F - Consent and Confidentiality Form

Purpose of the Study: You are invited to participate in a study of which explores the impact of moving home due to COVID-19. Specifically, I hope to learn how sophomore students are adapting to abrupt academic and social changes. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your eligibility by virtue of being a sophomore student who has lived on campus in ABC University's residences for the past two years but recently had to move home due to COVID-19.

Hennie Schoon, a doctoral student of the Ed. D (Leadership in Higher Education) program at Bethel University, is the primary researcher for this project. I am a currently employed at ABC University in the residence life department. I have worked in a number of university residence life programs for the past twenty years and my interest is in student development. This study will allow me to have a greater understanding of how students are experiencing moving away from campus due to COVID-19.

What Will Happen: If you decide to participate, I will connect with you via email to set up a time for an interview. The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. We will meet over Microsoft Teams and with your permission, our conversation will be audio-recorded. You will also be invited to participate in a focus group with other study participants within a month after the initial interviews are completed.

Risks or Discomforts: You may experience some emotional or mental discomfort as you think about and process how you feel about the amount of changes you have undergone. You may also experience some relief or new insight into your experience of your current situation. Your participation in this study will help improve understanding of the provision of effective

supports for college students. All participants who complete the interview and the focus group will be sent a $25 Amazon gift certificate.

If you choose to participate in the focus group, you will also risk sharing information that is personal to you and may be misunderstood by another participant in the group. However, you also may find comfort in knowing other students are experiencing similar situations.

Your rights:

1. You can decide on your own whether you want to be in the study.
2. You will not be punished or treated differently if you decide not to be in the study.
3. If you decide to be in the study, you will have the right to stop the interview or leave the focus group at any time.
4. If you decide to end the interview or leave the focus group, it will not affect your standing in the college, any future ABC University housing placement, or any regular services you would receive as a student at the college.

Your privacy is important:

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. One exception to confidentiality is in the event harm to self or harm to others (including intent) is disclosed. In that case, the information surrounding the self-harm or harm to others will be shared with appropriate ABC personnel and/or police.

In any written reports or publications, there will be no personal identifiers as pseudonyms will be used and only aggregate (collective) data will be presented. Aggregate data will be added to the dissertation research and may be used in future publications. After the data has been collected, data will be kept in a password protected secure location.

Confidentiality: By signing this form, you also agree to hold the nature of the study in confidence until the completion of the study in July 2020. Holding the study in confidence means that you agree not to talk about the content of the study or questions you were asked until the study has come to conclusion as this may impact the outcome for other participants. If you choose to participate in the focus group, you also agree not to disclose personal identifiers of others in the focus group and agree to keep everything that is discussed within the group confidential.

This research project has been reviewed and approved in accordance with Bethel's Levels of Review for Research with Humans. If you have any questions about the research and/or research participants' rights or wish to report a research- related injury, please call Hennie Schoon (616) 915-9582 or Dr. Craig Paulson, IRB chair for Bethel University at craig-paulson@bethel.edu.

To ensure that your rights as a research participant have been safeguarded, this study has also been reviewed by the ABC University's Institutional Review Board. You may contact this board at the following address at any time during the study if you have questions or concerns about your participation: IRB Chairperson, Office of the Provost ABC University. You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate and agree to keep the nature of the study in confidence. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participation in this study.

_____ _____

Participant Name Printed Participant Name Signature

_____ _____

Signature of Primary Researcher Date

Hennie Schoon, Bethel University Doctoral Student, (616) 915-9582